

Russia's Transnational Security: Challenges, Policies, and International Cooperation

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Key Findings

- The major innovation of Russia's new security strategy, adopted in May 2009, is its departure from a narrow interpretation of national security as a military or geopolitical concept. A wide variety of factors, including the broad gap between the country's rich and poor, the level of unemployment and the state of the country's health and education, have now been framed as fundamental components of Russia's national security.
- Russia's security strategy does not prioritize the country's transnational security challenges. It does, however, emphasize the vital importance of protecting the country and its people against terrorism, ethnic and religious extremism, and international crime, especially drug trafficking.
- Demographic decline and international migration are perceived as high priorities, although these topics are discussed less openly in view of their diplomatic sensitivity affecting the high-priority relations with former Soviet republics and China.
- Russia has shown interest and willingness to advance cooperation with other countries—first of all its neighbors—on transnational challenges. However, the level of such cooperation remains limited. Limitations derive from the high levels of corruption within Russia's security sector, legislative deficiencies in Russia, the weak legal basis for Russia's bilateral cooperation on transnational issues, as well as a lack of trust and confidence in her relations with neighboring countries.
- US-Russia cooperation on transnational challenges has been uneven and reflective of disruptive bilateral relations in the past few years. After a brief period of intensive dialogue and collaboration on counterterrorism measures following 9-11, the bilateral cooperation has been sporadic.

- Since President Obama took office, the United States and Russia have tried a fresh start. At the July 2009 summit in Moscow, the United States and Russia made concrete commitments to deepen security cooperation, pledging to work together to defeat violent extremists and to counter transnational threats, including those of piracy and narcotics trafficking. One concrete result of the summit was Russia's agreement to allow the United States to transport its military personnel and equipment across Russia in support of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led International Security Assistance Force and the Coalition Forces in Afghanistan.

Introduction: Russia's Security Perceptions

On 12 May 2009, Russia adopted a new national security strategy projected until 2020. The key innovation of the third post-Soviet iteration of Russia's security strategy is its departure from a narrow interpretation of national security as a military or geopolitical concept. Russia has traditionally relied on a "hard-power" vocabulary when constructing its doctrines and strategies, which led to a much greater emphasis on the needs of the military-industrial complex than that of civil society.

But in an era of global interdependence, national security is no longer simply a question of military strength or economic indicators, but also many other factors such as demographic strength, the quality of human resources and the quality of life. All of these factors find a prominent spot in Russia's new national security strategy. The new document acknowledges that a state's social, economic and humanitarian conditions are no less important for providing security than the size of its army. Factors such as the wide gap between the country's rich and poor, the level of unemployment and the condition of health and education are included as fundamental components of Russia's national security.¹

The new Russian security strategy, however, continues to distinguish between external and internal threats and does not specifically use the term "transnational security." Transnational security threats are considered within the concepts of state and public security (as opposed to national defense). They are also often referred to as nontraditional threats. Finally, the Russian concept of transboundary threats is quite broad and covers many transnational security challenges.

Major Transnational Security Challenges

Russia's security strategy does not prioritize the country's transnational security challenges. It does, however, emphasize the vital importance of protecting the country and its people against terrorism, ethnic and religious extremism, and international crime, especially drug trafficking.

The public relations center of Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) states in its 2008 annual report that "the possibility of infiltration of the territory of the Russian Federation by international terrorists remains the main destabilizing factor, which creates a direct threat to the national security and interests of the Russian Federation in the border area." There is, however, little evidence that such infiltration is happening at a significant scale: the majority of extremist and terrorist acts in Russia are organized and executed by homegrown groups.

At the same time, some well-known and highly disturbing challenges like demographic decline and international migration did not receive due prominence in the new security strategy. Reticence on these issues has in part to do with their foreign policy sensitivity, especially relations with the former Soviet republics and China. In closed meetings and private conversations, however, the demographic situation is portrayed as one of Russia's greatest challenges.

Demographic Security

According to a recent United Nations report (released in April 2008), Russia's population could drop from about 142 million today to 131 million by 2025, due to alcohol, smoking and poor diet. This demographic decline has serious economic consequences: there will be as many as eight million fewer people in the work force by 2015 and possibly nineteen million fewer by 2025. Sergei Mironov, speaker of Russia's Federation Council (Senate), believes that the most serious social problem in Russia today is the demographic crisis, and that if Russia does not solve it, Russia will cease to exist as a nation. It is clear from statements by political leaders that the government is aware of the problem and the serious threat that it poses to future economic growth and security as the country's workforce shrinks. What also is clear, according to demographers and public health experts, is that the government has not made enough effort to identify the root of the problem or to measure whether extant policies to address the demographic crisis are really helping. Although some financial

incentives have been created to help couples have more children, a much more comprehensive approach is necessary. The UN report cautioned that the government's demographic policy would fall far short of its goal of stabilizing a rapid decrease in the country's population. The situation in the Russian Far East is particularly disturbing, with the already tiny population of seven to eight million people living on this vast landmass shrinking by approximately one hundred thousand people every year.

Health Security

Russia is one of the few countries in the world where life expectancy has declined since the 1960s. In 2006, the life expectancy for Russian men was 60.6 years, about fifteen years lower than that of most developed countries. The number for women is higher, at 73.1, but still almost ten years below that of most developed countries.ⁱⁱ

Experts agree that a large share of early deaths in Russia, particularly among men, is preventable. Cardiovascular diseases account for 55 percent of all deaths, four times the rate in Western Europe.

Reducing the death rate among the working-age population by 38 percent by 2025 is one of the government's targets, with the ultimate goal of raising average life expectancy to seventy-five years—the current figure for Mexico.

Over the past two decades, state spending on healthcare has, however, remained meager, and the population has failed to develop healthier lifestyles.

Most demographers agree that the Russian government needs to find ways to lower alcohol consumption, particularly the abuse of cheap, low-quality alcohol that kills thousands every year. Annual alcohol-related deaths averaged about 426,000 over the past twenty years, representing almost 30 percent of deaths among men and 17 percent for women. Studies show that mortality rates have risen or fallen in tandem with alcohol consumption rates in the country, and both rose in the 1990s.

HIV in Russia

Russia has the fastest growing human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) rate in the world, with new cases doubling every twelve months. Russia represents two-thirds of all HIV cases in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. While the number of “registered” cases is three hundred thousand, experts

believe the number to be closer to three million when unregistered cases are considered. Eighty percent of infected people in Russia are under the age of thirty. A combination of young people being infected and an aging population is resulting in a decreasing workforce and population; if left unchecked, this trend will have a significant economic impact by the year 2020.ⁱⁱⁱ

After the breakup of the Soviet Union and the formation of the independent Soviet states, HIV was a low-priority issue. With the emphasis on the newly independent Russian Federation, HIV agencies commanded little importance and even less funding. Poor networking among the few HIV organizations that existed resulted in an inadequate flow of information between the agencies. Russian medical professionals received very little training on how to recognize and treat HIV and related illnesses.

Today in Russia, things have not improved much. HIV is a growing problem for many of the same reasons as when it began twenty years ago. The Russian Government has vowed to commit more resources and attention to the HIV problem. Yet, little progress is being made. HIV education is inadequate, and the societal perception—despite strong evidence to the contrary—remains that the problem affects only drug addicts and homosexuals.

Illegal Migration

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia experienced a major immigration boom. Millions of ethnic Russians found life in newly independent post-Soviet states politically uncomfortable, while millions of non-Russians experienced major ethnic and economic upheavals prompting them to move to Russia for a better life.

Because of the difficulties of tracking illegal migrants and the complex registration system for those entering the country legally, it is statistically not very clear how many people move to Russia annually. However, according to Konstantin Romodanovsky, who heads Russia's Federal Migration Service, more than twenty million migrants enter Russia each year as part of a post-Soviet “migration boom.” Of these, half are in the country illegally.

There is only one state program aimed at attracting Russian-speaking people from former Soviet republics into the country, but to be eligible for Russian citizenship and financial benefits, potential immigrants have to

settle in remote and sparsely populated areas, like the Far East. The program, which focuses on these “fellow countrymen” was established by then-President Vladimir Putin in June 2006 and was scheduled to kick into action in 2007. Viktor Ivanov, the Putin aide appointed to oversee the program, promised in an interview with German newspaper *Die Welt* in 2006 that the country was ready to welcome the twenty-five million ethnic Russians living in other former Soviet republics.

So far, however, the results have been very modest. According to a source in the Federal Migration Service, in 2007 only 2,100 immigrants were resettled in Russia as part of this program. The challenges are even more severe for potential immigrants who are not ethnic Russians. Isolation, the lack of social infrastructure, xenophobia and salary discrimination all make life for immigrants difficult.

The Chinese are Coming ...

If the Russian press is to be believed, a massive influx of Chinese into Siberia and the Russian Far East is turning the area “yellow,” and Russia is about to lose its easternmost provinces. Russia’s Far Eastern Federal District—a huge area covering 6,215,900 square kilometers—has only seven million inhabitants, and that is down from nine million in 1991. The population is declining rapidly as factories are closing down and military installations have been withdrawn.

Across the border, China’s three northeastern provinces—Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning—are home to one hundred million people, and the area has an unusually high unemployment rate. Many Chinese cross the border with Russia legally and illegally for work opportunities. Officially, forty thousand Chinese live more or less permanently in the Russian Far East, but the actual figure is believed to be much higher. Russians call it a “creeping occupation” by the Chinese.^{iv}

Moscow has tightened border control. However, due to corruption among immigration and customs authorities, it has not been very effective. More importantly, Russia does not have a clear immigration policy that could encourage legal migration to its under populated Far East. Ideally, however, the local Russians should be offered enough incentives not to move to European Russia.

Human Trafficking

Russia is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children trafficked for various forms of exploitation.

Men and women from the Russian Far East are trafficked to China, Japan, the Middle East, and South Korea for purposes of sexual exploitation, debt bondage, and forced labor, including in the agricultural and fishing industries. Moscow and St. Petersburg are destination centers for children trafficked within Russia and from Ukraine and Moldova for purposes of sexual exploitation and forced begging. The International Labor Organization of the United Nations reports that an estimated one million illegal migrant workers may be victims of labor trafficking in Russia. The Government of the Russian Federation does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so.^v

Russian legislation on human trafficking is ill-equipped to tangle with highly adaptable operators who use the country as a major source, transit and destination country for the trade in human beings. Human trafficking is seen by Russian legislators as primarily transnational and being about the sexual exploitation of women and children, when in fact trafficking for both internal and international labor exploitation is the most common form in Russia, according to a report funded by the Canadian government and supported by six United Nations agencies and the International Organization of Migration (IOM). Laborers are moved or migrate to cities from poorer regions within Russia and from former Soviet republics now comprising the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).^{vi} Russia needs to develop a comprehensive national strategy that acknowledges the gravity of Russia’s multifaceted human trafficking problem and allocates adequate resources to address deficiencies in victim assistance.

Transnational Terrorism

Along with drug trafficking, smuggling, and mass migration, the threat of transnational extremist penetration into Russia is one of the strongest arguments for the securitization of Russian border policy. In some cases militants and extremists have been discovered among those trying to enter Russia (both legally and illegally) from neighboring countries. Some of these extremists have cooperated with Chechen separatists and even made preparations for terrorist activities. Such activity was registered mostly across Russia’s border with Azerbaijan and Georgia, where illegal centers

supporting Chechen militants worked, and sometimes in territories near the Russia-Kazakhstan border.

Some observers perceive the mere presence of Chechen communities in some Kazakh and Russian borderland districts, in conjunction with Russia's overall illegal migration from traditionally Muslim non-CIS countries—as a phenomenon connected a priori with transborder extremism.

Violent Extremism in the North Caucasus

The Russian government has been caught off guard by a spike in violence in the North Caucasus over the past few months. After canceling antiterrorist operations in Chechnya, the authorities were convinced that the situation there had stabilized.

It is clear, however, that the picture is far less rosy. It has become obvious that the number of insurgents in the North Caucasus—primarily in Ingushetia, Chechnya and Dagestan—is greater than official figures have stated and that they have deep reserves and the ability to operate at a fairly professional level.

What started as the Kremlin's attempt to "Chechenize" the conflict in the republic—that is, to convert it into a domestic struggle rather than one between Russian troops and local forces—has now turned into a "Kadyrovization" of the problem, with all of its numerous drawbacks. As a result, Moscow is becoming increasingly annoyed with Chechen President Kadyrov's absolutism and the way his strong loyalty to the Kremlin is coupled with attempts to transform Chechnya into something bordering on an independent state. The Russian government is facing a dilemma about what to do next. On one hand, the direct application of force is no longer effective.

Sending federal forces to the region evokes hostility among local people and only escalates tensions. On the other hand, it is unrealistic and even dangerous to give full authority to local officials to solve their own problems, given the widespread lack of trust they have among the people.

In the meantime, the population of the North Caucasus continues to live according to its own laws. Blood feuds are on the rise again, and Islam is playing an increasingly central role in regulating social relations. Religion has become politicized from two sides. First, jihad remains a standard rallying cry for the Muslim opposition. Second, secular authorities frequently appeal to Islamic leaders, viewing them as

convenient tools for maintaining their own authority. Even traditional Islam has become politicized in the Caucasus, and in Chechnya the mosque serves as the center of political indoctrination for the republic's youth.^{vii}

The republics across the North Caucasus are experiencing an acute demodernization. The region is extremely weak. It has few elements of a modern economy, and the system of middle school and secondary education has practically collapsed. Emigration is growing, which in turn is causing tensions in neighboring regions of Russia. The problems in the region have definitely become one of Moscow's biggest challenges.

Drug Trafficking

Activities related to illegal movement of narcotic substances across the border and organizing channels of illegal migration by cross-border criminal groups continue to pose a serious threat to Russia's security. The Russian-Kazakh section of the border presently remains the main barrier along the drug trafficking route from Afghanistan and the Central Asian region to Russia. During the past two years alone, about 40 percent of the total volume of narcotic substances seized by border guards was seized on the border with Kazakhstan in close cooperation with Kazakh border guards.^{viii}

Currently, law enforcement structures are able to intercept only a paltry share of the drugs coming into Russia. Between 1,000 and 1,500 kilograms of heroin is arrested at Russia's borders annually. Based on conservative expert assessments that Russia's estimated one million heroin addicts consume on average 0.5 grams daily, the effectiveness of Russia's border protection system against heroin trafficking may be estimated at no more than 0.7 percent.^{ix}

President Dmitry Medvedev called a special meeting of the Security Council on 8 September 2009 where he declared drug abuse among young people a threat to national security and ordered the government to craft a program against illegal drugs that introduced tougher penalties for drug-related crimes. Medvedev said the number of drug users has shot up by nearly 60 percent over the past decade to an estimated two to two and a half million, or 2 percent of the population. Two-thirds are under the age of thirty. He said longer prison sentences should be handed down to people who deal drugs to minors, as well as for organized drug traffickers and corruption related to trafficking. Victor Ivanov, chief of the Federal

Drug Control Service, posited several ideas on how to fight the drug problem, such as compulsory testing of school and university students, a ban on drug abusers from occupying certain jobs and driving cars, and the compulsory treatment of drug users convicted of minor crimes.^x

Transnational Security Cooperation

Russia has shown interest and willingness to advance cooperation with other countries—first of all its neighbors—on transnational challenges. However, the level of such cooperation remains limited. Barriers to this cooperation include the high level of corruption within Russia's security sector, legislative deficiencies, the weak legal basis for Russia's bilateral cooperation on transnational issues, as well as a lack of trust and confidence in her relations with neighboring countries. The CIS has adopted numerous decisions on transnational security cooperation between its members, but very few measures are working. For example, since 2004, when Russia approached the CIS countries to conclude bilateral agreements on countering illegal migration, only Ukraine has agreed to the proposal.^{xi}

In Russia's relations with China, despite a proclaimed strategic partnership, the level of trust on demographic issues remains problematic. Russia's cooperation on transnational security with other Northeast Asian countries also is lagging. For example, according to numerous publications in the Russian media, the criminal groups of Russia and Japan have been collaborating much more effectively on illegal fishing than have law-enforcement agencies from their respective countries.

At the multilateral level, Russia has been most active in pursuing a common agenda on counterterrorism and drug trafficking.

Countering Terrorism

Russia's international strategy on fighting terrorism was most comprehensively articulated by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in his article "In the Face of a Common Threat," *Diplomatic Yearbook—2004*, Russian Diplomatic Academy.

This article calls upon members of the international community to assume collective responsibility for fighting terrorism and act multilaterally to advance the relevant international norms. Russia's willingness to genuinely engage in anti-terrorist multilateral cooperation

depends, however, to a considerable degree on the factor of reciprocity. For example, Russia has been urging the United States to give up double standards when dealing with terrorist movements, implying especially the lack of Western support for Russia's campaign in Chechnya. In the absence of such support, Moscow has demonstrably maintained close contacts with Hamas, which is identified by the United States as terrorist organization. As a long-term solution to religious extremism and terrorism, Russia emphasizes the need to protect religion and national cultures from the destructive impact of extremism and forge a "respectful dialogue" among religions and civilizations.

In regional terms, Russia would like the UN's Counter-Terrorism Committee to build up practical cooperation with regional organizations, including the CIS, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and the SCO.

Combating Drug Trafficking

The Russian Federation has been contributing to international antidrug cooperation. It has signed bilateral agreements with various countries ranging from South America to Thailand. Multilaterally, Russia has been particularly active in the CIS and the SCO. On 17 June 2004, during the organization's summit in Tashkent, SCO member states signed the Agreement on Cooperation in the Fight against Illicit Drug Trafficking.

The struggle against the threat of drugs occupies one of the central places in the agenda of the Central Asian Cooperation Organization, of which Russia became a full-fledged member on 18 October 2004.

Given that Moscow considers Afghanistan the main source of the narco-threat for Russia, it has suggested the need for an international strategy—including economic, social and law enforcement measures in Afghanistan and beyond—to fight Afghan drug trafficking. In particular, Moscow advocates the creation and strengthening of "antidrug security belts" round the periphery of Afghanistan's borders and those of the next-door states. The chief goal of this initiative is to put a stop to the outward flow of Afghan drugs and the inward stream of chemical substances that are precursors for the production of heroin. This is perceived not as a sanitary cordon but rather a collaborative scheme that will operate only with cooperation between the Afghan government, the international military forces in Afghanistan and the neighboring states.^{xii}

The Russian Federation has offered assistance to Afghan antidrug

agencies, including staff training at Russia's specialized education centers.

In 2004 the problem of Afghan drug trafficking was examined in the Russia-NATO Council. The Russia-led CSTO invited NATO to consider the possibility of joining efforts in the fight against drug trafficking in Afghanistan. Moscow has urged the coalition forces deployed on Afghan territory to strengthen the Afghan section of the border with Tajikistan.

US-Russia Transnational Cooperation

US-Russia cooperation on transnational challenges has been uneven and reflective of disruptive bilateral relations in the past few years. After a brief period of intensive dialogue and collaboration on counterterrorist measures following 9-11, the bilateral cooperation has been sporadic. The activity of the bilateral working group on antiterrorism has declined and is uneventful. Russia has been suspicious of the US military presence in Central Asia and its rationale of supporting counterterrorist activity in Afghanistan. Moscow fears an increased Western political and ideological presence in what it considers to be Russia's sphere of influence.

The main reason for the lack of US-Russia transnational security cooperation has been the preeminence of geopolitical and ideological agendas in bilateral relations in contrast with both countries' pronounced priority to deal with transnational challenges. Washington has been suspicious of Russia's resurgence and potential neoimperialism, while Moscow has accused the United States of promoting the "color revolutions" in former Soviet states neighboring Russia as well as unilateralism in international affairs.

After President Obama took office, the United States and Russia made some progress in defining common areas of concern and cooperation. At the Moscow Summit on 6–8 July 2009, the United States and Russia made concrete commitments to deepen security cooperation. For example, the countries are to work together to defeat violent extremists and to counter transnational threats, including those of piracy and narcotics trafficking. At the summit, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mullen and Russian Chief of the General Staff General Makarov agreed to a work plan for resuming military-to-military cooperation in areas such as counterterrorism, search and rescue, and counterpiracy.

Another tangible result of the summit was Russia's agreement to allow the United States to transport its military personnel and equipment across Russia in support of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force

as well as the Coalition Forces in Afghanistan. This agreement adds flexibility and further diversifies crucial supply routes, resulting in a potential savings of up to US\$133 million in fuel, maintenance, and other transportation costs. The significance of this contribution to US efforts to bring about peace and stability to Afghanistan, which also is of strategic benefit to Russia, should not be understated.^{xiii}

Washington and Moscow also agreed to strengthen cooperation in nonstrategic areas. For example, the United States and Russia took steps to build cooperation in public health, which may include strengthening work between US and Russian scientific research institutions on HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis and prevention and treatment of cardiovascular disease.

Finally, President Obama and President Medvedev recognized the need for a more structured foundation for advancing cooperation in key areas across respective interagencies. The newly formed Bilateral Presidential Commission—to be chaired by the two presidents and led by Secretary Clinton and Foreign Minister Lavrov—will provide a mechanism for sustaining and expanding on the progress achieved in Moscow, while also providing a forum in which the United States and Russia can work together effectively to narrow differences.

ⁱFyodor Lukyanov, "A Positive but Confusing Security Strategy," *Moscow Times*, 20 May 2009.

ⁱⁱ*Interfax News Agency*, 17 March 2008.

ⁱⁱⁱMark Cichocki, *The Cold War Is Over, but the War Against HIV Has Yet to Begin*, HIV Around the World—The Russian Federation, About.com Health Disease and Condition, 3 April 2007.

^{iv}Bertil Lintner, "The Chinese are coming ... to Russia," *Asia Times Online Ltd*, 27 May 2006.

^vTrafficking in Persons Report – 2008, Tier 2 Watch List, Released June 04, 2008, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, Country Report: Russia

^{vi}"Inventory and Analysis of the Current Situation and Responses to Trafficking in the Russian Federation," Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), 24 June 2009.

^{vii}Alexei Malashenko, "The Kremlin's Violent Underbelly," *Moscow Times*, 29 July 2009.

^{viii}*ITAR-TASS* news agency, 12 February 2009.

^{ix}Sergey Golunov, "Ethnic Migration: A Challenge to Russian Border Security?" *PONARS Policy Memo No. 432*, March 2007.

^xNatalya Krainova, "Young Drug Users Called Major Threat," *Moscow Times*, 9 September 2009.

^{xi}Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Yakovenko's presentation at the conference on Labor Migration in Russia and CIS: trends, problems and avenues of cooperation, Russian Foreign Ministry website, 11 May 2007.

^{xii}Interview of Anatoly Safonov, the Russian President's Special Representative for International Cooperation in the Fight Against Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime, *Interfax News Agency*, 20 January 2005.

^{xiii}"Obama, Medvedev Announce New Afghan Cooperation," CBS News, 6 July 2009.