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**Russia: Foreign Policy Concept Paper – The 2016 Version**

**Summary:**

**The recent 2016 update to Russia's Foreign Policy Concept Paper (previously updated in 2013), emphasizes Russia's success to ascertain its hegemony on the map of international influence. It further echoes Russia's growing criticism over Western conduct – both American and European – as destabilizing the world order, a fact which poses a big question mark over the possibility of achieving real rapprochement with them.**

**The paper's characterization of global trends, puts emphasis on the lack of stability and on the constant squabbling over setting the *rules of the game*, as well as over resources. It further highlights the fact the "force is becoming an increasingly important factor in international relations".**

**Main Points:**

1. Russian President Vladimir Putin approved the paper setting Russian Foreign policy on 30.11.2016. This is an update of the previous version, publicized on 2013 when Putin reassumed presidency, and is meant to reflect foreign policy changes necessary in light of developments in recent years: The crisis in Ukraine; the campaign in Syria; world terror etc.
2. Despite the world's many recent upheavals, the concept of Russian Foreign Policy remains unchanged in ascertaining Russia's political main interest, which is "*to consolidate the Russian Federation’s position as a center of influence in today’s world";* to ensure its "national security, sovereignty and territorial integrity"; as well as to "create a favorable external environment that would allow Russia’s economy to grow steadily and become more competitive".
3. There are no changes as to Russia's delineation and prioritization of geographical zones of particular interest. Thus the Middle East continues to occupy a modest place in the paper. Contrary to that, Russian continuing and deepening criticism towards Western conduct stands out, especially towards the American conduct, which is blamed for causing "greater instability in international relations and growing turbulence on the global and regional levels" – as particularly aimed against Russia itself, hence rendering the possibility of any bilateral rapprochement between Russia and the US, questionable. Despite the fact the both the US and the European Union continue to be designated as important economic and political partners, it is clearly emphasized that Russia will not tolerate any "attempts to interfere" in its domestic affairs and will reserve its right to counter any unfriendly measures. Putin's reference to the new American administration at his annual speech (1.12.2016) at the Federation Council, though emphasizing the benefits for the world that such US-Russian cooperation could yield, still basically corresponds to the elements presented in this paper.
4. The alternations inserted to this updated version (see below for elaboration on the differences between the versions), address the new challenges, namely: The clash between Russia and the West; Terror threats from various international elements; Challenges Russia identifies in the media arena, and how they negatively reflect on Russia's image. Nevertheless, this paper completely ignores the crisis between Russia and Ukraine or Russian significant involvement in Syria (despite including a special section on Syria).
5. Russia's established "position as a center of influence" to be reckoned with, is a recurrent and leading theme across the paper. The important difference is that in this updated version, Russia now feels confident enough to *proclaim* that it has already succeeded in de-facto achieving this focal position in the international arena, and hence demands recognition of this central position.
6. The paper's take on categorizing current international trends, also reflects the changing realities. Greater emphasis is made on the use of force in international relations, although it estimates that a large-scale war, including nuclear war between major powers, remains unlikely. Contrary to this, the paper estimates the chances for the eruption of *regional* crises as *possible*, including the chances for escalation, or for the powers being drawn into involvement if and when such possible crises do occur.

**Details:**

**The paper holds 4 main parts:**

1. Specification of Russian Foreign policy goals.

2. Current international trends.

3. Russian global and regional priorities.

4. Russia's foreign policy implementation.

Here is the analysis of the main parts of this long document (108 paragraphs):

1. **Russian Foreign policy goals -** The doctrine presented in this paper, prioritizes the achievement of the following goals:
   1. Ensuring national security, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and strengthening the rule of law and democratic institutions;
   2. Creating a favorable external environment to allow Russia’s economy to grow steadily and become more competitive; promoting its technological modernization as well as achieving a higher standard-of-living and quality of life for its population;
   3. Consolidating Russia's position as a center of influence in today’s world;
   4. Reinforcing Russia’s position in global economic relations and preventing discrimination against Russian goods, services and investments by using the options afforded by international and regional economic and financial organizations;
   5. Furthering the promotion of the efforts to strengthen international peace and ensuring global security and stability with a view to establishing a fair and democratic international system that addresses international issues on the basis of collective decision-making; the rule of international law, primarily the provisions of the UN Charter, as well as equal relations among States, with the central and coordinating role played by UN as the platform for regulating and promoting international relations.
   6. Building a zone of neighborly relations with Russia's adjacent states; assisting them in eliminating existing conflicts and preventing the emergence of new hotbeds of conflict;
   7. Promoting bilateral and multilateral relationships with foreign countries and with international organizations, guided by the principles of independency; sovereignty; pragmatism; transparency; predictability; a multidirectional approach and the commitment to pursue national priorities on a non-confrontational basis; expanding international cooperation on a non-discriminatory basis;
   8. Ensuring comprehensive and effective protection of the rights and legitimate interests of Russian citizens and compatriots residing abroad;
   9. Strengthening Russia’s role in international culture; promoting and consolidating the position of the Russian language, culture and science in the world.
   10. Bolstering the standing of Russian mass media and communication tools in the global information space and conveying Russia’s perspective on international matters to a wider public.
   11. Facilitating the development of a dialogue and partnership among various cultures and civilizations.

**Remarks:**

Most of the prioritized goals are similar to those appearing in the previous version of 2013. Two new goals were added (3 and 10 above) which reflect, to a high degree, the changes occurring in the Russian arena and the challenges it now faces.

**"*Consolidating Russia's position as a center of influence in today’s world"*** (section 3 above)receives in this version a separate section (and not as part of the "safeguarding security" section) and hence reflects Russia moving from a stage of merely demanding to be regarded as one of the leading vectors in a multipolar system, to **ascertaining as fact that Russia has indeed *achieved* a central position on the world's stage, and now has to act to further consolidate this status.**

Adding a specific reference to "*Bolstering the standing of Russian mass media and communication tools in the global information space and conveying Russia’s perspective on international matters to a wider public" (section 10 above)* is an outcome of Russia's *falling out* with the west, as reflected in western media. This fallout is reflected in European accusations against Russia of intentionally spreading disinformation by its media (in order to destabilize Europe) and by Europe's attempts to block access to Russian channels from European publics. Furthermore, Russia feels the need to "ensure that the world has an objective image of the country" and will develop "its own effective ways to influence foreign audiences" and deliver to the international community "unbiased information about Russia's perspective"' (including in reference of Russia's activity in Ukraine), and for internal reasons too.

Additional changes can be found in the section about "preventing discrimination against Russian goods" that was upgraded to being goal number 4 (in the 2013 version it was goal number 6). This section echoes the Western economic sanctions levelled against Russia. Furthermore, albeit not a new section, the reference at section 2 to achieving a "higher standard of living and quality of life for its population" stands out, and is attributed to the problematic economic state of Russia.

1. **Current international trends and Russia's foreign policy:**

**This part delineates the challenges and trends which influence the formation of Russian foreign policy. It should be noted that most trends had already began forming at the time of the previous version, and hence already appear similarly there. Nevertheless, the current version emphasizes: Fighting world terror (ISIS); the moral debate on who determines the "interpretation of the fundamental international legal norms" guiding the world order (an order that now includes the strengthening of Asia); competition over resources; and force as an increasingly important factor in international relations.**

1. **The world is currently going through fundamental changes** related to the emergence of a multipolar international system. Globalization has led to the **formation of new centers of economic and political power**. Global power and development potential is **shifting towards the Asia-Pacific Region**, eroding economic and political dominance of the West.
2. **There are growing tensions and competition over resources, access to markets and control over transport arteries. This competition involves not only research and technological capabilities, but has been increasingly gaining a civilizational dimension in the form of dueling values.** Against this backdrop, attempts to impose values (specifically western values) on others can stoke xenophobia, intolerance and conflict, leading to chaos and increasing instability in the world order. The struggle for dominance over shaping the key principles of the future international system, has become a key trend at the current stage of international development.
3. **Amidst escalating political, social and economic contradictions and growing uncertainty, force is becoming an increasingly important factor in international relations.** Efforts to expand and upgrade military capabilities and to create and deploy new types of weapons undermine strategic stability and pose a threat to global security which is underwritten by a system of arms control treaties and agreements. **Although a large-scale war, including nuclear war, between major powers remains unlikely, these powers face increased risk of being drawn into regional conflicts and escalating crises.**
4. **Existing military and political alliances (namely NATO) are not capable of countering the full range of threats the world is currently facing.** This is not conducive to ensuring stability and security, hence a different and more flexible approach in needed to find effective solutions to conflicts.
5. Alongside military might, other tools including economic, legal, technological and IT capabilities influence international politics and are taking center stage, in a way that is detrimental to efforts to find measures to settle disputes by peaceful means, such as diplomacy and negotiations.
6. **The growing threat of international terrorism is the central challenge**. The spread of extremist ideology and the activity of terrorist groups in a number of regions (primarily, in the Middle East and North Africa) are intensified as a result of systemic development problems, as well as by external interference. Combined, these two factors have led to the destruction of traditional governance and security mechanisms and the illegal spread of weapons and ammunition. The ideological values and prescriptions imposed from outside in an attempt to modernize political systems have exacerbated the negative response of such societies as is exploited by extremist forces, using distorted interpretations of religious and traditional values to promote violence in pursuit of their goals in the political, interethnic and interreligious rivalry.
7. **A new global terrorist threat has reached a new high with the emergence of the Islamic State** international terrorist organization and similar groups that have descended to an unprecedented level of cruelty in their violence. Confronting this challenge can only be done by creating a broad international counter-terrorist coalition.
8. Additionally, transnational organized crime is gaining momentum on an international level, including trans-border threats; the illegal proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; illegal migration; human trafficking; corruption; piracy etc. Such treats require a comprehensive response by the international community under the coordinating of the UN and in accordance with human rights, and by maintaining global stability.

**3.** **Russian global and regional priorities:**

**3a. Russian global priorities:** As an outcome of the above trends, Russia focuses its global activity on the following topics:

1. Shaping a fair and sustainable world order;
2. Maintaining and strengthening the supremacy of international rule of law;
3. Strengthening International Security;
4. Promoting international economic and environmental Cooperation;
5. Enhancing cooperation on international humanitarian issues and Human Rights;
6. Delivering to the international community, through world media, information about Russia’s perspectives, initiatives and efforts on foreign policy.

**3b. Russian regional priorities:** These sections specify the map of Russia's interests by geographic zones, and can serve to show Russia's prioritization of the importance of the various regions. Although the prioritization itself remains the same in this updated version, a special attention should be given to the change of tone towards the west.

1. **The post-Soviet space continues to be the region of utmost importance for Russia** (it therefore seems that only few changes have been inserted in the relevant sections). Developing bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the region's states, especially within the **Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)** and within the **Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)**, receives top priority, especially in the fields of economic, intelligence and security cooperation. In this framework special attention is given to Russia's lead of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

Russia continues to declare its strong advocacy for a political and diplomatic settlement of conflicts in the post-Soviet space, (Republic of Moldova, the Transnistrian issue and Nagorno-Karabakh) and to strengthen the independent entities of

**Abkhazia and South Ossetia**. The reference to its relations with **Georgia** hasn't changed from the precious version.

**Ukraine**, which did not appear as a separate issue in the former version, now receives a very mild reference, one that completely misrepresents the problematic relations between the two states, to quote: "Russian Federation is interested in developing political, economic, cultural and spiritual ties with Ukraine in all areas on the basis of mutual respect… Russia undertakes to make every effort to promote political and diplomatic settlement of the internal conflict in Ukraine…"

1. The relations with the EU and the US ("The West") are at second and third place in Russia's Foreign Policy priorities. Whereas in the previous version of the 2013 policy paper, priority was given to advancing the economic and political relations between Russia and the West, **in this version the criticism leveled against the West is evident.** The criticism is attributed to what Russia perceives as "geopolitical expansion pursued by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU)" as well as their refusal to discuss the creation of a common European security and cooperation framework. Further criticism is leveled against the containment policy adopted by the "US and its allies" against Russia, aimed at exerting political and economic pressure on Russia. The doctrine does mention Russian view that

the EU remains an important trade, economic and foreign policy partner for Russia, and mentions the latter's interest in "constructive, stable and predictable cooperation with EU countries", but this is shadowed by the sharp criticism leveled against it. The European states specifically named in the paper, by order of importance are: Germany; France; Italy and Spain (UK and The Netherlands, which were mentioned in the previous version, are not mentioned this time).

As for the relations with NATO, special mention should be made to **the complete deletion of the section talking about the goals common to Russia and the Western States, including NATO members, to safeguard peace and world stability.**

**As for the US, the paper states that Russia "is interested in building mutually beneficial relations with the United States of America" based on the previously set rules of "equal footing" and "non-interference in each other’s domestic affairs". However, it is stated that "Russia does not recognize the US policy of extraterritorial jurisdiction beyond the boundaries of international law** and finds unacceptable attempts to exercise military, political, economic or any other pressure". **Russia will therefore reserve "the right to firmly respond to hostile actions, including the bolstering of national defense and taking retaliatory or asymmetrical measures".** Russia continues to support "constructive cooperation with the US in arms control". **The paper states that Russia will continue to view "the creation of the global missile-defense system by the US as a threat to its national security"** and reserves the right **"to take adequate retaliatory measures."**

The paper mentions cooperation with **Canada** in the framework of developing the Arctic, a region of prominent importance to Russia.

1. **Cooperation with Asia and the Pacific** (fourth place): It is highlighted that Russia itself belongs to the Asian region, and therefore prioritizes relation with the region's states and regional bodies (SCO and ASEAN). Amongst the prominent partners in this region are mentioned (in accordance to their order of appearance in the paper, as reflecting their relative importance): China; India; Mongolia; Japan; South Korea; Vietnam; Indonesia; Thailand; Singapore; Malaysia. And in the Pacific: Australia and New-Zealand.
2. **The Middle East continues to assume only the fifth place, as in the previous version, despite Russian growing involvement in it and the region's surmounting critical challenges.** According to the doctrine, Russia will continue "making a meaningful contribution to stabilizing the situation in the Middle East and North Africa, supporting collective efforts aimed at neutralizing threats that emanate from international groups". As a permanent member of the Middle East Quartet of international mediators "Russia will further strive to achieve a comprehensive, fair and lasting resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in all its aspects consistent with international law". ***It is important to note that the text of this revised section does not include a specific reference or demand to "the establishment of an independent Palestinian State living in peace and security side by side with Israel", as the 2013 version had.***

**Syria:** By our estimation **the reference to this issue in this paper is extremely limited, in a way that does not correspond to Russia's substantial involvement in this state:** "Russia stands for a political settlement in the Syrian Arab Republic and the possibility for the people of Syria to determine their future based on the Geneva communiqué of June 30, 2012, statements by the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) and relevant UN Security Council resolutions."

**Iran:** The reference to Iran has been changed to accommodate the new reality pursuant to the Nuclear Deal. Emphasis is put on "comprehensive development of cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran" and "the consistent implementation of the joint comprehensive agreement to settle the situation around the Iranian nuclear program based on UN Security Council resolution 2231".

1. The reference of the Russian doctrine to Latin Amerian and Caribbean States, and to Africa, remains without any significant changes (and take the sixth and seventh places in the overall regions prioritization).

**Summary:**

As with other Russian policy papers (such as the Military Doctrine), Russian Foreign Policy Concept Paper 2016 is designed to reflect Russian general outlook on current affairs (threats and opportunities), yet should not be regarded as a document that can give actual forecast or estimate to any particular Russian moves in the foreseeable future. The language and emphasis used by those who phrased the document, are similar to those used in official Russian statements, and apply the same justifications given by Russian officials to their political moves. Familiarizing oneself with this vocabulary, for those dealing regularly with Russian affairs, is therefore advisable, and could help better understand their intricacies.