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## Б. РЕГИОНАЛЬНЫЕ ПОДХОДЫ

### **RUSSIA'S SECURITY CHALLENGES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

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The article is devoted to the examination of the principal Russia's security challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Main threats and key international problems as well as potential ways to cope with them are under analysis.

**Key words:** Russian Federation, economic problems, military threats, USA, China, military capabilities.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union and the creation of Russian Federation our political situation has been rapidly changing — especially when it comes to friends and opponents. In recent years, when Russia managed to overcome the internal political and economic instability, we were able to start implementing more or less independent and persistent foreign policy.

When we were to develop our own policy, which had not been imposed by USA, we had to choose which way to go: to continue claiming to be a global power, or to choose a less ambitious role of a regional leader. Both of these positions had their own pros and cons: the first one was hard to implement, because we were very limited economically and politically, due to the transitional period that we were going through; but this way we did not lose (mostly in our own eyes) many of our privileges in the foreign affairs arena. Another path would let us focus on our development but at the cost of our ambitions.

Whether it was a good decision or not, we chose not to give up our political plans, even though we failed to understand that monopolar world is not the best place for claiming leadership. This political outlook is what defined our position in foreign affairs and what predetermined the main challenges we were to experience (or perhaps still are to experience).

The most recent document that defines the challenges and threats that our country is facing or is about to face — is «Russia's National Security Strategy to 2020» [1], an official document that was accepted by president Medvedev. According to this document, our country is facing threats from three main directions: Islamic world, China and the West [9].

Now, not to be politically incorrect, we have to note, that all of these directions are not just sources of threats, but also have some opportunities for our country — the difference is in the ratio of positive and negative results.

Before we take a closer look into these three, we need to name our main vulnerabilities in order to be able to note whoever has a better chance for exploiting them:

— Russia has a sizable population. This is generally a good thing, but in our case, this population is rapidly decreasing and aging — and it is also outwashed by the rising uncontrollable immigration from Central Asian countries and from many others.

— Even though we have more than 100 million people and a vast amount of land, our country is very unequally populated, which leaves big parts of Siberia and east coast with just a small amount of inhabitants.

— Over 10% of the population of Russia is Muslim. While the majority of them (in Tatarstan for example) are more or less russified and cause no problems, many in Chechnya and other Caucasus republics are getting very fond of Islamic radicalism [6]. As we know many of these republics were very interested in the idea of separating from Russia back in the 90s' and that Islamic radicalism has led to lots of violence before — keeping this in mind we have to understand that religious radicalism it is only going to lead to an ethical and confessional conflict in our country.

— Very important factor is that Russia is very rich in petroleum and natural gas, but has an underdeveloped economy and infrastructure, that does not allow us to apply the money efficiently [6]. Moreover, Russia is very dependent on the prices of oil and natural gas, since exporting them is the main source of money for the federal budget. If there were to be a significant drop in prices for these resources, Russia would definitely experience a vast economic crisis.

— Russia has a huge military potential: we have an army with a million people in it; we have very popular, effective and cheap weaponry and equipment, which many foreign countries such as China and India are more than happy to buy. But if you take a closer look, you would notice that the majority of this 1 million people army consists of the unprofessional soldiers, who are required to serve 1 year after high school, when only a bit of our soldiers are accrual professionals who have a contract. When you look at the new weaponry — only a few percent is going to our army, when the rest is being sold to other countries. Therefore, when China and India are equipping their army with our new advanced weapons, we ourselves have to use older version. In addition, even if we start talking about our new weapons (that we do not particularly use) being technologically advanced — we need to mention that this is quite relative comparing to how much western countries have improved their warfare [8]. All this is leading us to the idea that Russia's army is not all that competitive after all, which can only be proven by the way we were recently fighting in Georgia during the conflict over South Ossetia.

All of the above brings us to the point of realizing that Russia's position in the world is in fact quite fragile, even though it might seem like a very potent country. Of course, there are many more vulnerabilities, but naming them all is not the point. Now more about the challenges we are facing and how they correlate with what I mentioned before.

First, our relations with China. We all have to keep in mind that any country that has such a big potential and rapid growth poses a good deal of threat to all of its neighbors. Economically China can be a very good partner for Russia, especially when it comes

to selling energy resources, and politically China can be of a great use for Russia when we are talking about cooperation on the level of UN Security Council. However, there are two specific problems China creates for us: uncontrollable immigration into a scarcely populated Siberia, which might lead to a de facto loss of land to Chinese immigrant groups (who often tend to be very aggressive); and the territorial claims that China has to several parts of our country. Just recently, president Putin signed a treaty, where we agreed on giving away some territory to China, while at the same time we keep fighting with same claims from Japan, declaring that no Russia's land can be given away. That especially sounds threatening, when you think about rapidly growing China's military forces — one of their aim is to create a very competitive army. Have anyone ever thought why do they need it? Certainly, there is no threat of military intervention for China; therefore, their vast military forces are not for the defense reasons. In addition, we all understand that China does not have enough land for its massive population, which makes it very possible that Chinese people, once they reach the peak of their potential, can start expanding their borders by force. Even though Russia can be a tough enemy, our Siberia is a much better reward, than small and poor in resources Southeast Asian countries.

When it comes to Islamic world, we need to mention that opportunities that come from the cooperation with these countries are very limited. Partially it is so because the countries we are talking about are mostly considered political outsiders. This also implies that their economical capability is unable to provide any good deals for us. Mainly we cooperate with these countries for political reasons — for example, as a political opposition to the United States. Politically this is quite advantageous for us in the outcome (just like in the conflict in Syria), but there is another part to that — being too involved with Islamic countries attracts attention of Islamic fundamentalists — their ideas tend to be very popular in our Caucasus republics. The supporters of these ideas have a very high conflict potential, which eventually can lead to some very unpleasant events, such as a war in Chechnya for example. Even recently, we had a terroristic act in Volgograd, where a Radical Muslim suicide bomber had set off an explosive in a crowded bus. We need to keep in mind that right now we do not have any significant problems with our Islamic republic and there is no good reason for these acts. A good example of such a risk of being involved into conflicts in Middle East can be the immigration from these countries. Imagine if we started defending Syria and accepting all the refugees from there — it is not only a wave of non-russified Islamic immigrants, but also consider what would happen if Russia had to change its position on the Syrian problem? These immigrants would most likely be very upset about it and even try to take some radical actions to influence the situation.

The democratic West presents another threat for Russian Federation or at least it is how it's put in «Russia's National Security Strategy to 2020» and is often claimed by our government. Our relations with western countries have been far from perfect, especially when it comes to the United States. Before the year 1996, we were very eager to ally with the States and to enter western civilization, but eventually we were disillusioned with this idea and understood, that USA and Europe are not willing to put that much effort in this

process. Due to this fact, we started a separate and often very confrontational foreign policy of our own in order to try to recuperate the power we previously had in the time of USSR.

In my opinion, «Western Challenge» is mostly an ideological phenomenon. Even though the Cold War is far over, we tend to demonize western community in media, political sphere and everyday life. Quite evidently, this anti-western propaganda is implemented for the political purpose — undemocratical Russia can never be in good relations with democratic West. The very existence of the democratic West that does not have as many resources as Russia but for some reason has a much higher level of life, can make people in Russia doubt about the legitimacy of the political power that is misusing the resource potential of the country. Also due to a very big importance of democracy in our modern world, being considered as a nondemocratic state can have grave consequences for Russia; since the USA and EU are the only actors who have the power to blame Russia in lacking democracy, the amount of potential threat to Russia from the West only rises in our own eyes.

In the West, in return, neither governments nor people can be accused in being too interested in Russia rather than in a mineral resources supplier. And if we are talking about the United States — they are not so fond of our resources anyway. For example, in the USA the most important problems are the ones of a domestic origin — it is quite rare when you can hear anything on Russia on the news (or in fact other far away countries).

Moreover, United States and the West in general have no intention of military invading Russia [1]. Thus, we should reconsider calling them a most likely enemy, when there is a much bigger and rapidly militarizing threat right at our borders. Moreover, even the Islamic challenge despite its scale is adequately a much bigger threat to our wellbeing, than the West. The only sphere, where we clash with western countries is foreign affairs, which is very predictable, since we tend to stand on a different part of the political balance. We need to keep in mind that this is a very natural state of things. A political opponent should not be mistaken for an enemy. At least because United States are not our only opponent in the world arena — even China, who right now has quite similar targets with us, at the very end has its own national interest and would not be sacrificing it for the wellbeing of another country. After all international politics is an extremely pragmatic thing and I can't think of an example, when one country would do something good for another state just out of the good will and intentions — every action in the foreign affairs has its own selfish purpose.

The only way in which West can pose a good deal of potential threat is being very technologically advanced. As I said before, West does not seem to like the idea of military intervention in Russia, provided that we have a good nuclear arsenal, but even so — the fact that the United states are ahead of us in the technological sphere can be quite uncomfortable [9]. That is even more true since USA are known to implement the best technologies they have in the military sphere. Needless to say high-tech weaponry grants a great advantage comparing to the ordinary arms. Just to understand how big is the scale of weaponry modernization in the United States, we have to mention Defense Advanced

Research Projects Agency (Darpa) [5] — institute that is responsible for the development of the most promising projects in the sphere of defense. It was established in 1958 and served to make sure that American army was the most technologically advanced. As it happens, this agency lived to our modern days and all these years it has been doing its job to make United States army the most competitive army in the world. If you look into the projects that DARPA has active right now, most of them have robotic technology basis:

- «ACTUV» — an unmanned Anti-submarine warfare vessel;
- «Atlas» — a humanoid robot;
- «BigDog» — a four-legged support robot;
- «Combat Zones that See» — the ability to track everything in the target city by the a massive network of surveillance cameras;
- «EATR» — an autonomous tactical robotic system;
- «Human Universal Load Carrier» — battery-powered human exoskeleton;
- «XOS» — military exoskeleton;
- «MeshWorm» -an earthworm-like robot [8];

All of this serves to only one purpose — to exclude a human from directly participating in the battlefield, which itself is already very impressive.

We need to note, that we have to deal with all these challenges simultaneously, because they are interdependent. For example, allying with China against the United States might bring some good results in the political sphere for both China and Russia in the short run; but when the two of us will be left alone, we would have to deal with being «bossed around» by a more developed neighbor. Or otherwise try to deal with their military force all alone. Allying with the Islamic countries against the West can also lead to a vast popularization of radical Islam in our own country, which as we know can be quite destructive. And if we talk about a bold move towards the West — there are no guarantees, that western world would actually accept us as an ally, when we would definitely lose the support of the countries that we have right now, as for example China.

Overall, whether Russia wants it or not, it is about to face one of the most delicate political dilemmas in its existence. Keeping in mind that our internal development is far from being perfect, we need to precisely maneuver in the political arena, especially when it comes to the upcoming confrontation between China and USA. This way we can assure that we would get the best deal from both sides and not have to choose the side before we would already know which one is more profitable.

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