

Threat Perceptions: Russia and the Post-Soviet Space¹

Hanna Smith

Abstract: *In the international relations literature, a threat is defined as a situation in which an actor (state) or actors has the capacity or intention to inflict harm upon another actor (state) (Davis 2000: 10). This paper examines Russia's threat perceptions through the four National Security Concepts of 1997, 2000, 2009, and 2015. Perceptions of threat have a strong domestic political element. They have been found to have significant effects on public attitudes, tolerance of dissent, and support for political leaders (Hutchison & Gibler 2007). For Russia, an important role is played in both domestic and international politics by its Great Power identity. In relation to neighboring states, the asymmetry of power combined with this Russian self-identity poses a threat, since the domestic assumption is that Russia has a duty or right to oversee these states. This Great Power identity also prevents Russia from having a shared identity with its neighbors, which in turn increases the Russian sense of threat posed by its neighbors. Thus Russia—a post-Imperial power surrounded by formerly subordinate states—both presents and is affected by a greater sense of threat than is the case elsewhere. This article draws on Rousseau and Garcia-Retamero's (2007) work on identity, power, and threat perception, to identify why threat perceptions are once again back at the core of policy making in the Eurasian space.*

¹ The research for this article was conducted as part of a project funded by the Finnish Prime Minister's Office government analysis, assessments, and research activities fund. The opinions expressed in the article are those of the author.