

**DEMOCRACY, FOREIGN POLICY & THE MEDIA  
IN RUSSIAN FEDERATION.**

**FINAL REPORT  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>page</i>
<i>Introduction</i> .....	3
<i>1. Democratization and Perceptions of the International     Situation and Russian Foreign Policy</i> .....	4
<i>2. Major Goals of Russian Foreign Policy</i> .....	7
<i>3. Foreign Policy: of Actual or Imaginary Interest?</i> .....	10
<i>4. Is Russia Threatened from Abroad?</i> .....	15
<i>5. NATO Expansion as Perceived by     Russian Public Opinion</i> .....	18
<i>6. Assessment of NATO Expansion in Russian Mass Media</i> .....	23
<i>Conclusion</i> .....	32

## DEMOCRACY, FOREIGN POLICY & THE MEDIA IN RUSSIAN FEDERATION

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### Abstract

Since the fall of 1996 ROMIR - one of the leading research agencies in Russia – has been conducting regular surveys to probe Russians' attitudes towards foreign policy, NATO expansion and other international developments. About 1500 respondents were interviewed by a national representative sample covering every social group and all regions. The results obtained are of great interest not only academically, but for policy relevance. The key findings are presented in the paper.

### INTRODUCTION

There are several important aspects of foreign policy opinion among mass publics in the Russian Federation. The picture of post-totalitarian consciousness looks very sophisticated and dynamic. A step-by-step assimilation of standards, values and attitudes typical of an "open society" is taking place against the background of traditionally Russian expectations and fears as well as ideas of Russia's specific status and its relation, first, to European and, currently, to Western civilization.

In this context, a highly suspicious and hostile reaction to the possible admission of several states of Central and Eastern Europe to NATO would constitute evidence that the stereotypes and fears inherent not only to the Soviet period, but, to a certain extent, to the pre-Soviet one as well, still exist in the public consciousness.

Equally important, since mid 1994 the prevention of NATO expansion has been a priority of the Russian foreign policy, a policy fully supported by the national communist opposition. The population was made a target of aggressive propaganda campaign aimed at shaping consistent negative attitudes towards NATO as a source of military threat to Russia.

Therefore, the extent of negative and neutral attitudes towards NATO among the mass public can serve as an indicator of how resistant to political propaganda public opinion is. The analysis of underlying motives allows us to identify specific mechanisms designed for shaping public opinion and to explore how its rational and irrational elements are correlated.

And, finally, practical and political aspects of the issue are also important. When the Founding Agreement between Russia and NATO was signed in May 1997, it somewhat eased the tension and intensive debates between the Russian political elite and the leaders of NATO member-states.

However, a majority of Russian political leaders, especially the military and practically the whole national-communist opposition, remained as negative about NATO expansion as before. They were especially negative about a hypothetical admission of the Baltic states and some of the CIS countries to NATO. Consequently, it is of interest to explore how important foreign policy issues are to the population and to what extent the federal position on NATO expansion is supported by the general public.

### ***1. DEMOCRATIZATION AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION AND RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY***

The democratization process in Russia is a blend of long-term basic changes in the country's economic structure and society and the mind-sets of its citizenry and shifts and fluctuations brought on by the changing moods and goals of its political leadership. The goals of that process are clear: it is aimed at granting Russian citizens more freedoms, improving their living standards, and shifting to a more effective and more efficient economic system.

The process thus far has been problematic-- rather akin to “Suvorov’s march through the Alps,” in that the glow from the freedom gained is tarnished in the eyes of many Russians; the economy, despite recent changes for the better, is still unstable and fails to satisfy the needs of a sizeable fraction of the citizenry’s needs; and substantial numbers of ordinary Russians retain their preference for the socialist authoritarian values to which they were initially socialized.

In a survey conducted immediately after the victory of Boris Yeltsin in the summer 1996 by a research team at the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, only slightly more than half of the respondents (52%) stated that the present system or “democracy of a western type” was more suitable for Russia than the former system before perestroika. (Zimmerman, 1966) Time and again ROMIR has asked respondents in recent years whether they believed things in Russia “were going in the right direction.” In November 1996 only about 18 percent of those interviewed stated that things in Russia were going in the right direction. Approximately two-thirds (65%) thought they were going in the wrong direction and 17% were uncertain.<sup>1</sup>

Against a background of persistent domestic economic and political instability, foreign policy issues have had little salience to Russian mass publics in the 1990s. These publics are largely aware that Russia’s international status has weakened in recent years. In a national survey conducted in January 1997, fully two-thirds of the respondents thought it had become weaker, whereas 6% of the respondents said that Russia’s status had become stronger, 21% asserted that it had not changed, and 7% were uncertain.

While foreign policy is a matter of relatively low salience to Russians, it is not a matter of indifference. In an October 1996 survey 46% reported being “somewhat concerned” and 32% “very concerned” with only 6 percent asserting that the international situation was a matter of absolute indifference and 14% stating they did not care much about it.

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<sup>1</sup>Bad as this may seem, Richard Dobson has marshaled some evidence to suggest that there has been some slight upward shift in Russian assessments of the overall situation in 1995-96.

Nostalgia for the former Soviet Union remains especially strong. In the Institute of Sociology survey conducted after the 1996 presidential election referenced above, 65% agreed or strongly agreed with the proposition that “under no circumstances should the Soviet Union have been broken up.” Similarly, Russian respondents overwhelmingly assert that it is important “for Russia to restore its status as a superpower.” In the October ROMIR 1996 survey half the respondents (49%) answered that restoration of Russia’s superpower status was “very important,” and 28% said that it was “somewhat important.”

Interestingly, though, the desire for superpower status appears to be viewed largely through the prism of Russia’s economic problems. A substantial majority of the respondents (62%) answered that in achieving such status again economic development was a priority, 26% responded that both were important, and only 5 percent attached priority to Russia’s military status. Those who gave less weight to the restoration of Russia’s superpower status obviously associated that status with military power; among those (relatively few) who responded that superpower status was not at all important, no one answered that achieving military power was more important.

Russian respondents in the mass public do, though, see some linkage between what goes on in the world and what happens to Russia, though they are almost evenly divided as to whether what goes on in the world affects them personally.

In the January 1997 ROMIR survey, three-quarters (74%) of the respondents answered that the solution of internal economic and social problems in Russia is related to international developments, with 19% seeing no connection and 7% no giving an answer. In a recent paper, moreover, Zimmerman (1996) has shown the Russian preferences for the political system—which correlated highly with how Russians voted in the 1996 presidential election--were in part a product of broadly defined orientations to Russia’s links to the outside world. In multi variate analysis, there were separate effects for whether respondents regarded the United States as a threat to Russia’s security, said the Soviet Union should not have broken up, asserted that the West aspired to control the Russian economy, and said Russia should encourage the introduction of foreign capital

With regard to their individual experiences, the responses in the January ROMIR survey were considerably more diverse. When asked, "To what extent do you think international developments affect your personal life and that of your immediate household?" 20% said they were affected "very much," 39% "somewhat," and 36% said that international developments did not affect them or did not affect them very much.

In general, therefore, one can state that Russian citizens are concerned about the way that events outside Russia impinge on Russia and this concern translates into politically relevant orientations, even though perceptions of the impact on the citizens themselves is quite disparate. The concern for events outside Russia is nevertheless quite modest when compared with domestic problems, as is borne out in numerous surveys. In a January 1997 ROMIR survey, for example, 92% of the respondents identified overcoming economic problems or solving the problem of wage arrears as the main issue facing the country and an additional 3% referred to eliminating crime as the most important problem. One issue bearing on foreign policy - restoring the USSR - was mentioned by 2% of the respondents.

## ***2. MAJOR GOALS OF RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY***

In one of ROMIR's October 1996 studies, respondents were presented with a list of Russian foreign policy goals. The same list was presented to persons drawn from foreign policy elites in a survey conducted in October 1995. The latter were such people as members of the foreign policy committees of the Duma, editors and foreign policy commentators in the media, senior staff officers, major figures at foreign policy-related research institutes, and persons in economic ministries and privatized enterprises that had heavy foreign trade components. Table 2 shows the distribution of responses for the mass sample as well as the proportions from among the foreign policy elite respondents regarding the particular goal as more important. (A characteristic feature of elite respondents is that they answer almost all questions in surveys. As a result, those who thought a goal "less important" can be approximated by simply subtracting the figure given from 100.)

Table 1.  
Russian Foreign Policy Goals

Goals of Russian Foreign Policy	1996 ROMIR Mass Sample			1995 Elite Sample
	More Important	Less Important	Don't Know	More Important
Defense of the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation	85%	10%	5%	93%
Defense of economic interests of the country	94%	3%	3%	97%
Protection of the interests of Russians living in ex-Soviet republics	65%	28%	7%	78%
Safeguarding national security	91%	5%	4%	96%
Defense of the interests of the Russian state	94%	3%	3%	92%
Protection of interests of our friends abroad	16%	68%	16%	14%
Creation of favorable conditions for getting out of the current crisis	93%	2%	5%	94%
Development of relations with states in the "near abroad"	67%	25%	8%	83%
Strengthening of the role of such international organizations as the UN	44%	34%	22%	35%
Achieving military parity with the West	60%	27%	13%	45%
Support for and protection of human rights in other states	30%	57%	13%	90%

Elites and mass publics diverge somewhat in their assessment of these goals. Elites are more disposed to regard the protection of the interests of Russians abroad as a more important goal and more likely to value developing relations with the near abroad.

Mass publics are more inclined to answer that achieving military parity with the West, strengthening the UN, and supporting human rights abroad are among the more important goals of Russian foreign policy. Overall, though, those goals receiving the largest support in both instances were ones that spoke to the desirability of improving the country's economic situation, stabilizing the Russian Federation, and defending its territorial integrity. Neither among the elite or the mass respondents is there a majority that regards protecting the interests of Russians outside the former Soviet Union, supporting human rights elsewhere, or strengthening the UN as among the more important goals of Russian foreign policy.

Russia’s friends abroad come in for particularly short shrift; only 14% of the foreign policy elites and 16% of the Russian mass public considered “protection of the interests of our friends abroad” as among the more important foreign policy goals of Russia. Russia’s supporters abroad and Russians, especially Russians outside the former USSR, are on their own.

The average Russian’s preoccupation with economic issues also shows up in questions concerning the factors likely to “influence the goals of Russian foreign policy within the next three years.” The accompanying table (Table 2) provides a sense of what Russians think will affect those goals.

Table 2.  
Factors Affecting Russian Foreign Policy Goals

	1996 Mass Survey 1996			1995 Elite
	Important	Unimportant	D/K-N/A	Important
Situation within Russia	93%	3%	4%	97%
International economic factors, e.g. trade	82%	10%	8%	91%
Lessons learned from previous foreign policy errors	79%	12%	9%	62%
Western states’ policies	59%	28%	13%	84%
Geopolitical situation of Russia	53%	17%	30%	86%
Ever growing number of key areas of Russian economy in hands of foreign companies	47%	34%	19%	59%
War and sufferings of people in other countries	79%	12%	9%	62%
Position of Russians living abroad	45%	44%	11%	58%

Respondents were asked to categorize each item on a four-point scale ranging from “very important” to “not at all important.” The items have been collapsed for purposes of exposition. For ordinary Russians the centrality of the economic situation in shaping their notions of Russia’s goals is obvious. For them the situation within Russia and international economic factors will be the main elements shaping Russian foreign policy goals, along with lessons of previous foreign policy mistakes.

Foreign policy elites, by contrast, are less inclined to think such lessons will influence Russian foreign policy goals. They also have a more reactive conception of Russia's foreign policy goals. For them, Russia's geopolitical situation ( a concept which, judging from the "don't knows" responses on the part of the mass public, was simply too abstract for ordinary Russian respondents), and the policies of Western states will be important determinants of Russia's foreign policy goals. Like the mass respondents, Russian elites are most inclined to view the international economy and the situation within Russia as being important in affecting Russia's goals.

For neither elite nor mass respondents do notions of "international duty" evocative of the Soviet period before perestroika or the "global human values" of the Gorbachev era strike a strongly resonant chord. When asked what Russian foreign policy goals were and when asked the factors that were important determinants of Russian foreign policy goals over the next three years, Russian foreign policy elites and mass respondents accord relatively little weight to "war and sufferings of people in other states" or, for that matter, the "situation of Russians living abroad."

### ***3. FOREIGN POLICY: OF ACTUAL OR IMAGINARY INTEREST?***

The attitude towards NATO expansion can serve as an illustration, though an important one, of how the Russian society perceives events and developments going on outside the country and, in the first place, of how important they are for Russians living through a hard transitional period.

The results of the surveys make us think. Approximately three fourths of the interviewed claim they take a consistent interest in foreign policy issues. Thus, over 78% of them stated they were concerned or very concerned about the status of the country.

In the course of another survey, 75% of respondents said they were interested in foreign policy issues. Moreover, 74% claimed the solution of the most important problems facing the country depended on the international situation. Even more important is the fact that practically 60% of the interviewed believe international developments have a more or less great effect on their everyday lives.

If we assume that such responses are true and reflect actual attitudes of the Russian public consciousness, then foreign policy issues must constitute an important factor and motive of political behaviour.

Yet, there are serious reasons for doubts. It is hardly probable that practically three fourths of the Russian population take such a great interest in what is going on outside the country, given the current socio-economic crisis and radical changes in every sphere of social life.

The results of the surveys conducted by ROMIR substantiate our doubts. In fact, a true interest in international developments-- an idea that everyday life actually depends, to a certain extent, on events occurring outside Russia—would be accompanied by a rather high level of public awareness about those events.

However, in June 1997, i.e. at the moment when public debates about a forthcoming NATO session which was to make a decision about the NATO expansion were under way, only 33% of the interviewed stated they were aware of the plans to expand NATO, and another 18% believed they were somewhat aware. In other words, only half of the Russian population were aware or somewhat aware about this major political problem that Russia was facing.

Additional evidence is that at the moment that the Fundamental Act regulating relations between Russia and NATO had been signed on May 27, 1997 only 43% of the interviewed had heard about the signing, 17% claimed they had not heard about it, while the remainder found it hard to answer such a specific question.

These figures prove that explicit interest in foreign policy and security problems is missing. It should be pointed out that right at that moment the signing of the Act and its importance to Russia and the country's international status were being intensively debated in mass media.

The ideas of Russians about which states should be the first to be admitted to NATO look even more surprising.

Table 3.

"Which states will be the first to be admitted to NATO?"

State	Share of respondents who think this state should be the first to be admitted to NATO <sup>2</sup>
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Latvia	24.5% - 24.7%
Lithuania	24.2% - 25.1%
Poland	24.1% - 18.4%
Estoni	20.5% - 20.0%
Czech Republic	17.3% - 9.5%
Ukraine	13.4% - 10.5%
Hungary	11.8% - 7.7%

It can be seen that barely every fifth respondent was able to give a correct answer to the simple question actively discussed in mass media about which states would be the first to be admitted to NATO. It is even more important that 20% - 25% mistook the Baltic states for candidates. Evidently, some respondents who have no actual knowledge of the situation and who proceed from their own wrong idea, are likely to associate what they perceive as a threat to Russia—NATO expansion with those states towards which they have formed negative attitudes.

Russian public consciousness is characterised by simultaneous poor awareness about international developments and specific perceptions of the most important problems facing the country.

The results of the March 1998 survey can serve as an illustration.

<sup>2</sup> The first figure in the right-hand column was obtained during the survey in June 1997, while the second one - in January 1997.

Table 4.

"Which are the most important problems facing the country?"

To put an end to delayed payments of wages/salaries	72.4%
To overcome the economic crisis	54.3%
To eliminate crime	53.7%
To restore the USSR	13.6%
To strengthen the international status of Russia	12.1%
To continue economic reforms	8.7%
To develop democrac	3.9%
To prevent a threat from outside	3.5%
Other	3.1%
DK	1.4%

This distribution of problems facing the country and perceived as the most important ones, reflects the current complicated period of socio-economic development of the Russian society. It is quite natural that these are primarily the most burning problems, the ones which are the most worrying for a majority of Russians. Issues related to foreign policy, e.g., strengthening of the international status of the country, restoration of the USSR, etc., are of priority for a small share of respondents.

It is noteworthy that only 3.5% of the interviewed regard a prevention of external threat as highly important. Consequently, for the overwhelming majority of the population an external threat, whenever it might come from, is not perceived as very important.

Thus, there is every reason to assume that a specific "imaginary interest" or "quasi-interest" is typical of the Russian public consciousness in terms of international issues. Its essence is that, on the one hand, about three thirds of the interviewed consistently allege their interest in such issues.

On the other hand, those allegations are not supported by their awareness about the most widely discussed international issues because it is hardships of everyday life that, in fact, they are concerned about. We believe this is one of the contradictions inherent to the post-Soviet public consciousness.

The phenomenon can be accounted for by several factors. In the first place, the roots of the "imaginary interest" in foreign policy issues are likely to go back to the Soviet past. Given the isolation from the outer world, it was natural that people were curious to know about how other nations live, to compare their living standards and lifestyles with their own.

Besides, either by intuition or consciously, the people in the ex-USSR realized the existence of their own country was greatly dependent on the international situation, on whether the confrontation with the West or China would result in a nuclear war. They also wondered whether all hardships and privation justified by the necessity to oppose imperialism were really needed.

Nowadays there is no longer any opposition, at least for a majority of the population. However, the inertia of thinking, the mechanisms and attitudes that had been shaped before are still alive.

Possibly, there are also other reasons. We cannot disregard the fact that according to the Russian mentality, a person is perceived as "cultured", "educated" and "updated" only if he/she takes, or pretends to take, an interest in foreign policy issues, or, rather, in developments outside the country, because they are not always differentiated by public consciousness.

In other words, to admit a lack of interest, even in front of an interviewer, means to look as an "uncultured" person. And, finally, we can speak about realization, at least minor one, of the fact that Russia is becoming part of the world, a component of the universal civilization that is being formed.

Nevertheless, whatever reasons for "imaginary interest" are, its existence allows us to assume that no manipulation with international issues, issues related to NATO expansion included, is likely to have a great effect on public opinion.

#### **4. IS RUSSIA THREATENED FROM ABROAD?**

Most Russian mass publics do not currently regard the outside world as an intensely threatening place. A majority, to be sure, answer that Russia faces some threat, whether it be “some,” “a great”, or “a very great threat.” In the January 1997 ROMIR survey referenced above only a fifth (21%) of the respondents answered that there was a great or very great threat from the outside. Half again as many (31%) answered “none” when asked if Russia was threatened from the outside. Those who were younger were more likely to see the world as entailing no threat for Russia. Similarly, those with university education, regardless of their age, were much more likely to answer that no threat existed to Russia from the outside; roughly three of ten respondents without university education answered that no threat from the outside existed, while 45% of those with university education answered “none” ( $\tau_c .12$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

Age, certainly, and education, possibly, have a bearing on where respondents identified the source of the external threat. More than three quarters of the respondents fifty or over who identified a threat saw that threat as emanating from the west, whereas only 57% of those under 30 saw the source of the threat as coming from the west. Twice as many under thirty identified the source of the threat as from the third world as did those fifty or over ( $\tau_c .10$ ,  $p .05$ ).

Very frequently, a threat from outside, either actual or imaginary, is an important factor of survival for totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. An external threat is a tool by means of which the leadership succeeds to consolidate the society, to brainwash the population, to suppress dissidents, to mobilize resources for military build-up and to strengthen the repressive system. That was typical of the former USSR. We can even assume that a step-by-step erosion of negative attitudes and fears in relation to "imperialism" or "Western" civilization was one of the causes of the breakdown of the communist regime in the USSR and in Eastern Europe.

Therefore, how the outer world is perceived by public consciousness, how positive and negative attitudes towards the international environment are correlated, constitutes an important political factor and serves as an indicator of the stability of democratic transformations in Russia.

The results on the surveys conducted by ROMIR show first, that an external threat is not perceived as a great one, and, second, that there is a more or less clear tendency to perceive as a source of threat neighbouring Muslim countries than the West.

Approximately 60% of the interviewed (the figures are practically identical in all surveys) believe that there exists a threat to the security of Russia. But at the same time, a majority of them think it is more processes going on within the country than outside it that constitute a threat to Russia.

Thus, in the course of the survey carried out in January 1997 only 30% of the interviewed were able to identify a source of threat, while in June 1997 only 11% gave positive responses to the question about an external threat.

Out of them 50% - 60% were certain about an inner threat and moreover, were able to identify its causes and sources. They mentioned a threat of disintegration of Russia (11.5%), political instability (8.9%), corruption (8.8%), inner ethnic conflicts (7.7%), Chechnya (7.5%), economic crisis (6.0%) and crime (5.7%).

In view of the forthcoming NATO expansion it is highly important to know to what extent the West, USA and NATO are perceived as hostile and threatening by public consciousness.

Table 5.

Sources of external threat as perceived by public opinion

Source	January 1997	June 1997
"West", USA, NATO, specific Western states	22.0%	18.8%
"South", Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey	3.0%	24.0%
"East", China, Japan	4.0%	5.9%

We believe that explanations why the figures in the second line, i.e. shares of respondents perceiving "South" as a source of threat, differ so much are needed. In the first half of 1997 no important events occurred that could affect public opinion.

Possibly, the reason is that in the earlier survey respondents were asked an open-ended question, i.e. they were free to give countries or regions perceived as a source of threat to Russia. In the later survey a close-ended question was asked, i.e. respondents were to choose one or several options. It should be also noted that in June 1997 only 11% of the interviewed were able to give responses to an open-ended question about an external threat, while practically half of respondents chose one or several options, when they were asked a close-ended question.

We can also add that by now about 20% of Russians have come to perceive "Southern" or Muslim regions as hostile to Russia, as threatening to the country in general or specific persons in particular.

Yet, this "attitude" is probably best thought of as being latent, in that its bearers are neither aware of it nor can they articulate it without an external prompt, for instance, an explicitly worded question about whether they consider respective regions as a source of threat.

We can assume that such perceptions of the "South" have been shaped quite recently.

It is quite different in regard to the threat perceived as coming from the "West". The share of respondents who support this perception does not vary with the form of the question, i.e. it does not depend on whether it is a close- or open-ended question.

Therefore, we can conclude that this particular attitude is well established and formulated, and, likely, inherited from the Soviet past.

This state of public opinion allows us to expect that in the future the share of those who are suspicious or hostile to the outer world is going to increase thanks to a growth of people who are more likely to perceive South than West as a source of threat to Russia.

**5. NATO EXPANSION AS PERCEIVED BY RUSSIAN PUBLIC OPINION**

If less than one fourth of Russians are concerned about a threat from the "West", US and NATO, 45% to 50% of the interviewed are more or less concerned about NATO expansion.

Thus, in October 1997 when asked: "Do you think the existence and expansion of NATO are necessary now, when the cold war is over and the Warsaw Treaty Organization has been dissolved?", 23.2% of the interviewed answered in the affirmative, 45.3% - in the negative and 31.5% were DKs.

Table 6.

	Definitel yes	Somewhat yes	Somewhat not	Definitel not	DK
Are you concerned about plans to expand NATO? (January 1997)	29.7%	16.4%	9.2%	44.7%	0
Do you agree that NATO expansion is contrary to Russia's interests? (June 1997)	29.0%	19.4%	7.9%	5.0%	38.6%

A gap between the share of people who see the "West" as a source of threat and that of people who are concerned about NATO expansion stands as evidence either to certain contradictions existing in Russian public consciousness or to certain ideological myths about NATO. In other words, 20% - 25% of the population do not seem to perceive NATO as part of the West

Our assumptions are substantiated by the fact that NATO expansion is not closely associated with a growing military threat in Russian public opinion. In January 1997 only 18.6% of the interviewed (out of those who are aware of NATO expansion) thought there was a direct correlation between NATO expansion and an increasing threat to Russia's security, while 10% believed the admission of new members to NATO could result in a stronger international and European isolation of Russia.

It is noteworthy that about 35% of those who said they were concerned about NATO expansion (practically 17% of the sample), simultaneously claimed that NATO

expansion would have neither good nor bad consequences for Russia. It means that approximately every fifth Russian has a more or less explicitly negative attitude towards NATO, though he/she is unable to explain why its expansion threatens Russia.

The above data allow us to assess the effectiveness of the propaganda campaign launched in Russia in the context of NATO expansion.

As we have already stated, for 20% -25% of Russians, "West" is associated with a source of threat to Russia. It is quite natural they perceive NATO, an important military and political organization in the West, as something hostile and threatening. Intensive propaganda against NATO expansion is likely to build up the existing negative attitudes and fix them up in public consciousness, yet, it is unlikely to be responsible for their origination.

However, the results of our surveys show that approximately a similar share of Russians are concerned about NATO expansion, but they either fail to give reasons for their fears or think that the expansion won't have a great effect on Russia.

At the same time, some of these respondents assert that NATO expansion will bring Russia's international isolation. It is possible that this kind of concern could be described as "induced", as a result of propaganda efforts taken by Russian mass media.

If our assumption is right, then from one fifth to one fourth of Russians are susceptible to propaganda. Their views, at least in terms of issues beyond their routine day-to-day experiences can be manipulated through intensive informational pressure.

It is also important to find reasons for a striking gap between the figures in Table 6 representing a large share of those who are not concerned about plans to expand NATO (44%) and a small share of those who do not think NATO expansion is contrary to Russia's interests (5%). Primarily, as we have already stated above, approximately every second Russian has no awareness about NATO expansion or finds it hard to say whether he/she is aware of such plans or not. It is natural that they are not concerned and, consequently, cannot say whether the expansion is contrary to the interests of Russia or not.

Besides, only 46.3% of the interviewed were able to figure out what Russia's interests are. The distribution of their responses is given in Table 5.

Moreover, the results show that "natural" ideas of Russian citizens about national interests are not different from those of citizens of other nations. It is also obvious that issues related to military security of Russia are not of top priority. This seems to support the conclusions made above that major interests, fears and concerns of Russians are outside the domain of foreign and military policy.

Of greater importance is the fact that only a small share of respondents regard unification with Ukraine and Belarus as fitting with national interests of Russia.

It seems to be in contradiction with widely spread, but evidently wrong, ideas that an alliance and a follow-up integration with Belarus and a hypothetical unification with Ukraine are perceived by Russian public opinion as major goals of the nation's foreign policy. This finding could play an important role in the forthcoming election campaign.

Table 7.

Integrity of the territory and independence of the state	15.5%
Growth of economic and political power	8.6%
Peace, mutual understanding among Russians	6.1%
Unification with Ukraine and Belarus	5.7%
Strong borders, military security of Russia	4.9%
Other	5.5%

Russian public opinion perceives a hypothetical NATO expansion to the territory of the ex-USSR as a negative process. Yet, it is important that for a majority of the population such an expansion doesn't look as absolutely unacceptable.

The responses to the questions "What is your attitude towards a forthcoming admission of Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary to NATO?" and "What would your attitude towards an admission of the Baltic states or some of the CIS countries to NATO be?" asked in the June 1997 survey bear this out.

We can see that a share of negative and specific responses, that cannot evidently be accounted for by a statistical error, increases with approaching the Russian borders, i.e. the nearer a specific state is, the larger is a share of negative responses (from the former Warsaw Treaty member-states to the Baltic states and to the CIS countries).

While those who have opinions are overwhelmingly opposed to the idea of a CIS country joining NATO, it remains the case that such respondents constitute less than half of those surveyed. Such attitudes are contrary to the position of numerous Russian political and, especially, military, leaders who perceive an admission of any CIS country to NATO as absolutely unacceptable.

Table 8.

	Definitel positive	Somewhat positive	Somewhat negative	Definitel negative	DK
(Excludes the 38 % who had not even heard of NATO expansion.)					
<hr/>					
What would your attitude be towards the admission to NATO of ...					
Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary	6.2%	9.3%	16.9%	19.7%	9.1%
Baltic states	5.1%	5.9%	13.4%	30.8%	5.9%
Some of CIS countries	4.4%	4.6%	11.4%	35.9%	4.8%

It should be noted though that the results of the survey conducted a bit later, in October 1997, are somewhat different. Respondents were asked about their attitudes towards the Partnership for Peace program and about joint manoeuvres and other military actions undertaken within this program. The responses obtained demonstrate explicitly negative perceptions of military contacts between NATO and the CIS countries.

Though such contacts between NATO and Russia are perceived by public opinion more positively than negatively, the correlation between respective responses being approximately 4 to 3, the development of military contacts between NATO and the CIS countries is perceived negatively by practically 60% of the interviewed, while only 30% are positive about such contacts.

Table 9.

	Definitel positive	Somewhat positive	Somewhat negative	Definitel negative	DK
Attitude towards ...					
Partnership for Peace program between NATO and CIS countries	14.2%	32.9%	17.9%	12.7%	22.3%
Joint Russian-NATO military manoeuvres within this program	10.1%	33.2%	20.3%	17.1%	19.3%
Joint NATO-CIS manoeuvres within this program	15.2%	16.1%	35.2%	24.7%	8.8%

Those differences in figures are very interesting. Many Russians believe that military contacts between Russia and NATO are quite acceptable while other young independent states should not have any military contacts with NATO. In short, Russia, a great power, is allowed to do what other states of the former USSR are not.

## ***6. THE ASSESSMENT OF NATO EXPANSION IN RUSSIAN MASS PERCEPTION***

Russian elites attached enormous importance to the issue of NATO expansion. It has not registered as an issue for a sizeable fraction of the mass public. One of the surveys conducted by ROMIR in January 1997 demonstrated that the country was almost equally divided between those who had and had not heard of the possibility of NATO expansion. When asked about such plans, 45% said they had not heard of such plans and 9 percent answered “rather no than yes” when asked, almost the same number who answered they had heard of such plans or who answered “rather yes than no” when asked whether they had heard about such plans. Men (63%) were much more disposed than women (33%) to state that they were aware of the possibility of NATO expansion and those with some or complete university education were significantly more likely to indicate such an awareness.

Lack of knowledge of foreign policy issues among half the Russian citizenry is a

typical occurrence. In another ROMIR survey (reported in Zimmerman 1994), sample of European Russia divided almost exactly down the middle between those who thought Crimea a part of Ukraine and those who thought it had some other status. NATO expansion and the fate of Crimea are probably the two most significant issues to seize Russian foreign policy since the collapse of the Soviet Union. NATO's strategic plans in Central and Eastern Europe will have an impact on international developments for years to come. How the Crimean question is ultimately resolved will be of enormous significance for the future of Russian-Ukrainian relations. Consonant with a theme identified at the outset of this initial report, these data bring home how little foreign policy impinges on the consciousness of a sizeable fraction of the Russian citizenry, in contrast with domestic economic and political affairs.

This being said, it also bears mentioning that viewed in the aggregate, Russian respondents somehow or other provided an overall assessment of the consequences of NATO expansion and an assessment of the preferred policy responses that seems to suggest that the characterization of Americans as The Rational Public by Page and Shapiro (1992) transfers to Russia. Of those who gave some indication that they had heard of the possibility of NATO expansion, 35 percent said that "NATO expansion to the East" would increase the military threat to Russia, 31 percent chose it will do "neither good nor bad" for Russia, 11 and four percent respectively said it would contribute to Russia's international or European isolation and five percent said it would result in a better situation for Russia.

In like fashion, the range of responses concerning what Russia should do in response to NATO expansion bespeaks well of the Russian public's aggregate judgment, as Table 10 indicates. Respondents were presented a list of policy options that have been bruited as possible responses to NATO expansion. These included signing a full scale military treaty with Belarus, deploying nuclear weapons in Belarus, bringing Russian troops there, deploying nuclear weapons in Armenia, canceling disarmament treaties, canceling SALT specifically, canceling the treaty on conventional arms limitations in Europe, trying to join NATO, forming a military alliance within the CIS, "taking it easy, doing nothing", and strengthening European-wide security systems.

Overwhelmingly, Russians were most disposed to strengthen European-wide security systems, form a military alliance within the CIS and sign a full-scale treaty with

Belarus. No other alternative received the endorsement of a plurality of the respondents who were asked the question. While they were not at all inclined to sit idly by, they also overwhelmingly rejected propositions to deploy nuclear weapons in either Belarus or Armenia; bring troops into Belarus; or to cancel SALT, the treaty on conventional arms limitation in Europe or disarmament treaties in general.

Indeed, more associated themselves with the proposition that Russia should join NATO in response than said Russia should cancel SALT or the conventional weapons treaty or deploy nuclear weapons or Russian troops outside Russia. In short, there was a consensus in early 1997 that NATO expansion to the East called for a response by Russia but that response should be low risk and non-provocative.

## ***7. RUSSIAN PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT RUSSIA'S REACTION TO NATO EXPANSION***

Which reactions to NATO expansion are perceived as possible and desirable can serve as a major indicator of respondents' actual attitudes towards NATO. If it is perceived as something really threatening from the military viewpoint, then it would be reasonable to assume that Russia should respond with building up its defensive capacity.

In June 1997 respondents were free to give their own responses to the question (an open-end).

Table 11.  
 "What should Russia do if the following states become NATO members?"

	Czech Rep.	Baltics	CIS states
To build up defence, to form a military bloc, other military actions	17.1%	21.2%	17.1%
Political or diplomatic measures, boycott	5.1%	6.6%	12.7%
To stop economic cooperation, to impose sanctions	1.8%	9.8%	8.9%
To preserve and develop friendly relations, to join NATO	13.7%	9.2%	14.9%
To do nothing, not to put obstacles	19.6%	16.8%	9.0%
Other actions	7.8%	1.9%	0.8%
DK	34.9%	34.5%	36.6%

A large share of DKs is quite understandable: it has already been mentioned that numerous Russians have actually no awareness about NATO expansion. But it should be noted that, like the survey in January 1997, the share of respondents oriented to military actions in response to NATO expansion is about 20%. Evidently, this is a consistent indicator reflecting the actual popularity of military attitudes with people of traditionally Soviet mentality.

From one fifth to one third of the population are neutral or positive about NATO expansion. They are inclined either to do nothing at all or to search for closer contacts with NATO and to join it. From 2% to 20% of the interviewed favour political or economic sanctions, depending on whether it is the states of Central and Eastern Europe or the Baltic and CIS countries.

One can trace some increase in negative attitudes towards NATO expansion when it is the Baltic and CIS countries that could be admitted to NATO vs. Central or East European states.

**5. THE MEDIA, INTERNATIONAL EVENTS AND NATO EXPANSION**

In Russia as elsewhere, mass media are the main sources of information about international and domestic developments. Radio, TV, and the press not only provide information, but they also often shape the attitudes of those social groups that constitute their audience.

Table 10.  
Russian responses to NATO expansion to the East, January 1997

<b>What should Russia do?</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>D/K</b>
Deploy nuclear weapons in Belarus	26%	62%	12%
Deploy nuclear weapons in Armenia	11%	75%	14%
Sign a full scale military treaty with Belarus	72%	15%	13%
Bring Russian troops into Belarus	28%	57%	14%
Cancel disarmament treaties	35%	49%	16%
Try to join NATO	33%	45%	23%
Cancel SALT	28%	56%	16%
Cancel conventional arms limitation treaty in Europe	29%	52%	19%
Form a military alliance within th CIS	75%	13%	13%
Take it easy, do nothing	20%	68%	12%
Strengthen European-wide security systems	82%	5%	14%

(Some totals do not equal 100% due to rounding.)

TV channels and programs to watch, radio stations to listen to, are driven by peoples' political preferences, their social status and environment, and their self-conceptions. A characteristic feature of the Soviet system was its virtual monopoly over the flow of information and entertainment. Mass media information programs virtually duplicated each other. Information about the performance of state and CPSU bodies was monotonous and phrased almost identically in various media sources. The populati was socialized to trust the mass media and this socialization was often high effective, even when people paid little attention to the specific, often vacuous, content of the messages.

Arguments were clinched by assertions that "Pravda says,..." or "Vremya reported..."

Less well known among Westerners, the mass media also served as a kind of ombudsman. If certain breaches of laws or failings were reported in the media, appropriate steps were expected to follow. Those identified publicly were obliged to respond and to report on the corrective measures taken.

The collapse of totalitarian controls over the media, launched under Gorbachev's perestroika and continuing in the post-Soviet period, has resulted in a vast change in the structure of the mass media in Russia. The Russian media are now characterized by a variety of different printed media, ranging across a wide political spectrum and varying enormously in quality from trashy tabloids to high quality papers such as *Izvestia* has become. Television has become vastly more entertaining and diverse. In the process of media diversification, the myth of the credible and efficacious mass media, a belief challenged by only a slim stratum of the intelligentsia under Soviet power, died a natural death. Person now choose the media source to "consume" and have developed levels of trust for the sources they choose to listen to, watch, or read respectively.

The October 1996 ROMIR survey included a battery of questions concerning media consumption and trust in the media. Of the media, TV is by far the most popular. Practically every household owns a television set and roughly half the respondents claim that they learn about what is going on in the world and within the country by watching television daily.

Another quarter report they watch television nearly everyday and only five percent reported they had not watched television at all during the week prior to their being interviewed.

Domestic radio is less popular than television. Only a third (35%) of the respondent stated that they listened every day and a similar number reported that they listened either almost every day or several times a week. More than a quarter (27%) responded that they did not listen to radio at all.

The print media reaches an even smaller audience. In the October 1996 survey, respondents were asked whether they read “democratic” or “communist” newspapers. Five percent said they read democratic newspapers every day or almost every day. Thirteen percent of those interviewed reported reading democratic papers several times a week and almost two-thirds (65%) responded they had not read such newspapers during the week before the survey. Slightly less than two percent of those interviewed said they read the communist press daily or almost every day. Eighty six percent reported not having read any of the communist press during the week before the October 1966 survey. In the post-cold war environment neither the Western radio nor the communist press receives much attention, nor for that matter do the democratic print media. Mass media in Russia basically means television and local radio and to a lesser extent the press. It is from these sources Russians obtain news about international developments: 79% said they obtained information about international developments from TV, 60% from radio and 33% from the press.

Foreign radio no longer plays a role in the Russian media structure. Formerly, foreign radio stations were the only source of unbiased information. Their listenership was not large during the Soviet period. It is less currently. During the week before the October 1996 ROMIR survey, only one percent of those surveyed indicated that they listened to foreign radio daily, while 87% said they did not listen at all.

Trust and popularity are not the same thing, but they do go together. The connection with either and impact is problematic. Many Russians, when asked about media other than television or domestic radio respond, correctly, that they do not know--56% for foreign radio, 45% for the communist press and 32% for the democratic press.

Television and radio are the media sources respondents in the 1996 ROMIR survey most frequently said they trusted: 44% said they either trusted each completely or somewhat. What complicates the picture is that very few do not express judgments about the trustworthiness of TV.

As a result, the proportion of those actually expressing an opinion saying they trusted a media source is almost the same for television and for the democratic press, even though out of the total number of respondents, only 29% answered that they trusted the democratic print media.

How does the media affect policy choices? Given the dominance of television and the attention that elites have shown to the issue of NATO expansion, one might easily hypothesize a major role for the media, especially television, in shaping attitudes toward NATO expansion. An alternative hypothesis would be to emphasize the preoccupation with domestic developments and the limited trust in the media in the post-Soviet Russian context

In this conception, the sense of threat posed by NATO expansion would be driven by domestic considerations, demographic factors that in turn reflect divergent socialization patterns (age, most obviously) and basic assessments of the threat from the United States, which as we have seen, differ substantially across age cohorts. Using data from a survey of Russian citizens conducted in connection with the December 1995 Duma elections and the July 1996 Presidential elections, several alternative models were tested using logistic regression.

The demographic variable that produced a stable and independent effect in all the regressions was age. People over 50 are consistently more likely to be alarmed by NATO expansion than those who are younger. Those, regardless of age, who respond that the United States is a threat to Russian security extend that fear to NATO.

Likewise, preference as between the traditional Soviet economic model and a market-oriented economy has independent and stable effects. Television does not, though in most models newspaper readership does.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, television does not come close to approaching statistical significance.

This is an important finding and will be a central focus of the further development of this paper. Various hypotheses come readily to mind, several of which will be explored in future analysis. It may simply be that prior socialization and preoccupation with economic concerns so dominate a foreign policy issue such as NATO expansion that the effect of television is negated.

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<sup>3</sup> In one model we ran, newspaper readership dropped to a significance level of .07, slightly above the conventional .05 threshold.

Newspaper readership may itself reflect an orientation to the outside world, with those who rely on it constituting a segment of the population that cuts across other conventional analytic categories. Readership of particular newspapers in Russia as in other societies with a largely free and diversified press may constitute such an expression of political preferences that it shows up as an independent and generally stable effect in multiple regression analysis, even though in reality the causal arrows may largely go from orientation to East-West relations including NATO expansion to frequency and choice of printed media source read, rather than the other way round.

### *CONCLUSION*

When comparing responses to various questions one can conclude that about 20% - 25% of Russians have negative attitudes towards the West and NATO. They are likely to perceive them as a source of threat to Russia's security and are oriented to tough, primarily military, actions in response.

A similar share of people have poorly realized and generally ill-founded concerns about NATO expansion. One can assume that such attitudes are, at least partly, a result of propaganda campaign launched in Russia in view of NATO expansion.

At the same time, quite a large share (30% - 40%) of Russians are neutral about NATO expansion, while quite a small one (10% - 15%) are positive about it. The latter is of special interest since these respondents are obviously supporters of "pro-Western" ideas, quite well conceived and explicit. The fact that almost half the respondents who were aware of NATO expansion remained neutral or were even positive toward it suggests the limited effect of the propaganda campaign waged by the government. Those with explicitly negative and positive attitudes towards NATO expansion to the East seem to make a group of people who are better informed about what is going on in the world and who are really interested in international developments.

We believe this array of attitudes is in good keeping with general political likes and dislikes, and with shares of the population voting for national communist parties and groups on the one hand, and for liberal, democratic movements, on the other hand.

The fact that, despite the anxiety reflected in the strong propensity to identify the Baltic republics as the first to join NATO, we observe relatively modest differentiation in perceptions of NATO expansion to the territory of Central or Eastern Europe, on the one hand, and to the territory of the former USSR, on the other hand is of considerable policy relevance. The public is clearly more concerned about possible NATO expansion to the Baltic states or to the CIS than to Central and Eastern Europe. But the magnitude of that concern suggests that the Russian leadership would find it hard to persuade Russians that, should the Baltic or CIS countries join NATO, tougher reactions are needed in response to such occurrence than has been the Russian response for the states of Central or Eastern Europe.

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