

William Zimmerman, University of Michigan

Abstract

This paper asks whether contemporary Russian foreign policy elites' conceptions of Russia's national interests, as articulated in March and April 2008 (immediately after Dmitry Medvedev's election) mesh with those of President Medvedev. Where pertinent, Medvedev's statements are compared with those entertained by foreign policy elites at the onset of then President Vladimir Putin's second term in 2004. The paper asks how the 2008 elite perspectives relate to major policy predispositions concerning the use of military power and energy resources for foreign policy purposes and about Russia's long term relations with Belarus and Ukraine. In conceiving of Russia's national interests, Russian foreign policy elites had a broader physical domain in mind in spring 2008 than they did in 2004. A far higher proportion of Russian elites in 2008 than in 2004, but by no means a majority, has a global or nearly global conception of the domain of Russia's interests. I argue that those who define Russia's national interests more narrowly largely are drawn disproportionately from two divergent clusters of people: those whom we might depict as the military industrial complex (military officers and major figures in state dominated industries) and those from among the relatively small set of people who answer that Western style democracy is the political system most suitable for Russia.