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Russia – Reemerging as a Global Power?

Jacek Więclawski

Department of International Political Relations
Lazarski School of Commerce and Law, Warsaw

A Review of Roger E. Kanet (ed.), 2007. *Russia: Re-Emerging Great Power*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 256 pp., \$84.95. ISBN-13: 978-0230543041 (hardcover).

(1) After the implosion of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the bipolar order, the international system has entered a period of transition and fluctuation of power with no specific name yet for the new system. For some analysts, the U.S. leadership is a cornerstone of the future global order; others prefer a multipolar order as the most appropriate regime for future international relations. Some observers argue, however, that the transitional period will last for a long time and the only certainty in international relations is permanent change.

(2) One tendency, however, seems to be clear and consequent: the strong will of Russia to reestablish its international position as a great power and an important pole of the new order. Since the coming to power of President Putin, the re-emergence of Russia as a global superpower has become political task number one for the Russian leadership. From the Russian point of view, the new international order should be based on multipolarity, not unilateral U.S. domination, and with Russia as a leading center of global international relations.

(3) *Russia: Re-Emerging Great Power* tries to answer difficult questions about Russia on its road to global power. Analyzing sources of Russian power, vectors of Moscow's foreign policy and means to achieve Russia's main political goal, the volume presents a comprehensive, broad and solid consideration of the internal and international determinants of Russian foreign policy, especially during Vladimir Putin's tenure as Russian President. It refers to the recent rapid economic growth and authoritarian evolution of the Russian political system as well as the evolution of its foreign and security concepts including Moscow's policy towards other international subjects – the USA, the European Union (EU), China, Iran, and the former Soviet Republics in the Commonwealth of Independent

States (CIS).

(4) Edited by Roger E. Kanet, Professor in the Department of International Studies of the University of Miami, the book presents academic research from the USA (Robert O. Freedman, Roger E. Kanet, Larisa Homarac), Europe (John Berryman, Graeme P. Herd, Susanne Nies, Bertil Nygren, Ingmar Oldberg), and Russia (Nikita A. Lomagin, Vladimir Rukavishnikov). The book is comprised of an Introduction and nine chapters of similar size: Part I: *Russian Strategy Under Putin* (chapters 1-3) and Part II: *Russia, the CIS and the World Beyond* (chapters 4-9), followed by a conclusion and an index. Each of the chapters has a clear and distinctive structure with introductory and concluding remarks as well as notes at its end referring to a rich catalogue of primary and secondary sources.

(5) So far, Russia has not achieved great power status again but is on the verge to do so, according to the contributing authors. Kanet writes, "Russia will likely gain significant influence in global affairs" and "has already made great gains in reestablishing its role as an important global actor" (223). Recent Russian economic growth has been a result of growing world gas and oil prices, yet increasing power refers nowadays not only to economic and military capabilities but also to "soft-power" skills (124). However, the rising role of Putin's Russia in international relations has not been soft. Moscow's intervention beyond the territory of separatist Abkhazia and South Ossetia has shown strong Russian ambitions for great power status and indicated possible future tensions between Western interests and Russia's goal to regain global influence.

(6) Russia's great power claims under Putin are based on military capacity, growing world oil and gas prices, and concentration of power in the presidential hands. However, some analysts underline that Russia's global power aspirations seem to be limited insofar as the Russian economy lacks advanced technology and depends on growing exports of raw materials (chapter 1 by Ingmar Oldberg). Russia's economic growth is also dependent on its relations with the West, high oil prices, and EU gas consumption (chapter 3 by Vladimir Rukavishnikov).

(7) The Russian effort is accompanied by Moscow's preference for a "multipolar" world not dominated by the U.S. Russia opposes any American or EU interference in the zone it considers as its zone of influence. This sphere of influence usually comprises the CIS area. But spurred by its rapid economic growth, Russia has turned its eyes also to Latin America and other territories of former USSR influence, including the Soviet Union's position in the Middle East (chapter 3 by Vladimir Rukavishnikov). Russia has been trying to balance its relations with the USA by partnering with Europe and, facing problems in relations with the EU as a whole, by developing relations with the most powerful, members of the EU. At the same time Moscow's relations with China have balanced its relations with the West, although with limited results (chapter 1 by Ingmar Oldberg).

(8) The perception of Russian security has evolved since the collapse of the Soviet Union. After an initial period of growing emphasis on "soft security" issues (34-36) and internal sources of threats, a clear return to a traditional military perception of security has been observed under Putin's

presidency (chapter 2 by Nikita A. Lomagin). Several aspects of Russian policy, as illustrated by the governance over Kaliningrad with a liberal scenario for this area, as well as Russia's approach towards the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh with Moscow's participation as a "neutral arbitrator" (144, 147) in the international framework of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) Minsk Group have reflected Russian flexibility and "soft policy" attitude. However, Russia is not a great power in the sense of "soft power" (124), that is, the power to attract, persuade and contribute with peaceful proposals (chapter 6 by Susanne Nies).

(9) The zone of post-Soviet republics of the CIS remains the area of fundamental Russian interests. Moscow has been desperately attempting to confirm its domination of the CIS area by opposing the will of CIS states to become more independent from Russia, especially Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Ukraine (chapter 1 by Ingmar Oldberg). Moreover, "colour revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine have limited Russian foreign policy flexibility in the CIS and brought leaders to power that Moscow does not support (chapter 3 by Vladimir Rukavishnikov). Perceived as inspired by the West, the "colour revolutions" have strengthened Russia's nervous reactions to Western interference in the Russian zone of influence and Moscow's support for separatist movements in Georgia and Ukraine.

(10) The broader process of consolidating Russian great power status in the area of the CIS is reflected in Moscow's policy towards separatist Transnistria in the Republic of Moldova as well as separatist Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia. The preservation of Transnistria as an unresolved "frozen conflict" (82) has strengthened the position of Russia and weakened the presence of other international actors in this area. However, together with the perspective of the EU integration of Romania, the focus of the EU on Transnistria has increased. Yet the growing EU pressure to solve the conflict has caused Moscow to warn of a possible recognition of Transnistrian independence (chapter 4 by Graeme P. Herd).

(11) Similarly, after the "Rose Revolution" in Georgia, the Russian-Georgian relations have deteriorated significantly and President Saakashvili's attempts to take control over separatist South Ossetia and Abkhazia have met strong Russian resistance. Russia has changed its previous "saber-rattling" policy towards Georgia (107-108) for a softer "purse policy" (113-114) to control the Georgian economy by monopolizing its energy distribution and transfer system (chapter 5 by Bertil Nygren). However, the military means have not been fully abandoned (as the Russian intervention in Georgia in 2008 illustrated) and Russian support for the separatist republics in Georgia remains a strategic instrument of influence in the South Caucasus (chapter 4 by Greame P. Herd). Moreover, as the Caucasus is an area of crossing international interests over oil and gas, Russia has tied producers to Russian pipelines and opposed any routes avoiding Russian territory. Therefore, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, which bypasses Russia, has strongly irritated Moscow and prompted its further support of the separatist movements in Georgia (chapter 5 by Bertil Nygren).

(12) Besides Russian interests in Georgia and South Caucasus, Russia has been concerned about its position in the CIS countries in Central Asia, not only because of the threat of Islamist activities but also in the context of

the U.S. presence in the region. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the USA emerged as a political player in post-Soviet Central Asia, and after September 11, the establishment of U.S. military bases in several states has strengthened Washington's presence in the area. Russia has perceived this presence as indicative of Washington's determination to roll-back Moscow's influence in Central Asia. Although President Putin supported the U.S. war on terror, the U.S. military bases in the region have inclined Moscow to reassert its position in Central Asia (chapter 7 by John Berryman). As a result, Russia has attempted to punish the states in the region economically that are willing to cooperate with Washington, and it has begun to try to take advantage of the growing difficulties the U.S. is experiencing with semi-authoritarian regimes in Central Asia (chapter 8 by Roger E. Kanet and Larisa Homarac).

(13) The deterioration in U.S.-Russian relations has also been reflected in the Middle East with the Russian participation in the construction of the Iranian nuclear power plant in Bushehr. Even before Putin, Russia considered Iran an useful ally in international relations. However, Russian arms sales to Teheran and Moscow's involvement in the Bushehr project have badly affected U.S.-Russian relations. The international debate over Iranian nuclear facilities put Moscow in a difficult place between its will to maintain good relations with Iran and the increased international pressure to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. However, a series of events in 2004, including the Beslan school hostage crisis and tragedy, undermined Putin's image as a strong leader. Signing the agreement on the supply of nuclear fuel to the Bushehr reactor (chapter 9 by Robert O. Freedman) confirmed the important role of Iran in Moscow's global game, but the flexibility of the Russian policy with regard to the Iranian card was quickly narrowed by the aggressive rhetoric of the new Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

(14) At the same time, Russia has been afraid about future Chinese influence in Central Asia, although both countries expressed their will to maintain stability in the region. This was reflected by the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and attempts to create a Russian-Chinese political condominium in the area. Nevertheless, the prospects for a healthy Russian-Chinese cooperation in Central Asia remain uncertain. The development of economic links between the states of the region and the rapidly growing Chinese economy may lead to a more intense Sino-Russian rivalry and a possible shift of power in the area towards Beijing (chapter 7 by John Berryman). Still, both countries express their joint reluctance to U.S. interference in the region. In addition, Moscow has become more confrontational towards the West in protecting its interests in the area (chapter 8 by Roger E. Kanet and Larisa Homarac).

(15) Even if Moscow has not achieved great power status again, the authors of *Russia: Re-Emerging Great Power* confirm Russia's growing international influence and her deliberate moves towards this goal. The significance of Russia as an international player will probably increase and Moscow's growing self-confidence may further limit Russia's respect for other actors. On the other hand, Russia remains part of the international system and its economic resources remain vulnerable and dependent on world economic fluctuations. Thus, the international community may have to deal, in Kanet's words, with a "Russian petro-state that is weak, loud and potentially unstable" (224).

(16) The value of the book lies in its comprehensive analysis of the economic and political determinants behind Moscow's quest for great power status, as well as its broad reflection of Russian foreign policy vectors. The book analyzes the evolution of Russian foreign policy as a dynamic and complex process. Taking the specific historical and cultural background of Russian foreign policy into account that affects Moscow's behavior on the global scene and does not necessarily fit Western standards, it reflects a realistic attitude to international relations based on the dominance of Russian national interests.

(17) As all chapters are highly instructive and competent, it is difficult to favor some of them, especially as they deal with different aspects of Russian foreign policy. However, the chapter on *Russia's Great Power Ambitions and Policy Under Putin* by Ingmar Oldberg might be pointed out; it presents the broadest overview of Russia's global position, including the role of Russia's relations with Europe, the USA and China. As the book refers to different vectors of the Russian foreign policy and different determinants of Russia's role in international relations, different readers will probably define different preferable chapters according to their interests. Nevertheless, a chapter that would have dealt directly with Russia and the European Union would have been useful. The Oldberg chapter touches upon this issue, but a full-fledged consideration of Russia's aims in its relations with Europe, the Russian-European cooperation, and the attitudes of both sides towards the USA and U.S. policy would have been instructive.

(18) If some of the book's theses are provocative, the main lines of Russian foreign policy that it presents are valid and relevant for further consideration, especially in light of the recent deterioration in Russian-Western relations caused by the disputes between the USA, the EU, and Russia over the separatist republics in Georgia. Thanks to its comprehensive analysis of Moscow's international posture and the clear presentation of its theses, it can serve both professional researchers and students. *Russia: Re-Emerging Great Power* is one of the most interesting books in the area of Russian studies published recently.