



RISING POWERS INITIATIVE

SIGUR CENTER FOR ASIAN STUDIES

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Russia as a Global Power: Contending Views from Russia

The collapse of the Soviet Union generated a multipolar world where international status is attained through both views in Russia on the nation's place in the world and its relationship with the West. In more recent years, however, Russian foreign policy can be characterized as one shaped by a pragmatic approach to balance of power politics and economic development. This outlook and its policy manifestations, along with India.

dissenting views, were the theme of a recent conference on "Russia as a Global Power," organized by the Rising Powers Initiative at the Elliott School of International Affairs.

Russian worldviews since 1991 can be categorized into roughly three schools of thought, argue Andrew Kuchins and Igor Zevelev in *Worldviews of Aspiring Powers*. The "Pro-Western Liberals" stress a European identity and favor closer integration with Europe through collective security and economic liberalization, but they have fallen out of favor since their brief rise in the early 1990s. The "Nationalists" see Russia as a distinct civilization apart from the West, and advocate the use of military power to secure Russia as an independent center of power in Eurasia. In contrast to the regional perspective of the Nationalists, the "Great Power Balancers" believe that Russia should have global aspirations in

Sovereignty and Non-intervention in Syria

On the question of Russia's position on the current civil war in Syria, the general consensus was that Russia has opposed the involvement of foreign powers in Syria due to its firm belief in the principle of non-intervention. This principle is grounded in the "Russian view of how international affairs should be organized at large," explained Fyodor Lukyanov, Editor-in-Chief of *Russia in Global Affairs* and Chairman of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy. In this light, Russia's earlier support for intervention in Libya should be seen as an aberration on the part of President Dmitry Medvedev and is unlikely to be repeated, argued Lukyanov.

Andranik Migranyan, who has held several key policy advisory positions in

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This Policy Brief is based on the discussions at the conference on "[Russia as a Global Power: Contending Views from Russia](#)," co-organized by the Sigur Center for Asian Studies and the Institute for European, Russia, and Eurasian Studies on March 18, 2013 in Washington, DC.

The event featured the following Russian panelists:

- **Vladislav Inozemtsev,** Centre for Post-Industrial Studies
- **Fyodor Lukyanov,** *Russia in Global Affairs* & Council on Foreign and Defense Policy
- **Andranik Migranyan,** Institute for Democracy and Cooperation

the Russian government and is now the Director of the Institute for Democracy and Cooperation in New York, also strongly affirmed Russia's principle of non-interference in Syria. "Russia's principal concept is that so-called democracy promotion and regime change are not an adequate policy in the current world, and it would be better for the United States to reconsider its policy on these issues because this is becoming less and less accepted by many other rising and important actors," said Migranyan.

Lukyanov further dismissed speculation that Russia's position on Syria was driven by geopolitical calculations in the Middle East, yet others disagreed that Russian motives were solely the reflection of its belief in nonintervention. Syria lies on the supply route of hydrocarbons from the Middle East to Europe, and thus if a new Syrian government has close relations with Saudi Arabia and Qatar, oil and gas supplies from the Persian Gulf might undercut Russia's exports to Europe, argued Vladislav Inozemtsev, Director of the Center for Post-Industrial Studies in Moscow and Chairman of the High Council of the Civilian Force Party, a recently established center-liberal, pro-European party in Russia.

Motives for a Eurasian Customs Union

Just as Russia's policy on Syria reflects a particular worldview, so does its 2010 initiative to create a customs union comprised of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. Experts disagreed on whether this project is motivated by political or economic factors. Inozemtsev expressed skepticism that Russia will be able to derive any tangible economic benefits from the Eurasian Customs Union because the member economies are too similar in their dependency on exports of oil and raw materials. Thus, argued Inozemtsev, this is a highly political project that is analogous to Boris Yeltsin's 1996 proposal to unite Belarus with Russia.

This view was a marked contrast from that of Migranyan and Lukyanov, who both praised the Eurasian Customs Union as a laudable attempt to strengthen Russia's economy through further economic integration with its neighbors and eventually the European Union. Lukyanov explained that "Putin's view on the international economy is that in order to play a role, any role, a big country needs to extend markets and to create a sphere [with] harmonized rules." For Putin, this process of regional integration is "similar to the initial stage of European integration 60 year ago," said Lukyanov. Migranyan agreed, rebuking those who harbor suspicions of Russia trying to expand its geopolitical influence through this customs union: "Only loons can think that this is a kind of reestablishment of the Soviet Union or some kind of empire, which we very often read in the Western media."

Russia's Relations with Asian Powers

Even if one sets aside the question of Russia's relations with the West, debates over Russia's other external relations remain contentious. Some Russians, while cognizant of economic competition and potential strategic challenges from China, generally hold a positive view toward developing a constructive partnership with China. "China is a natural partner with Russia," said Migranyan, pointing out that "China is a rising power and is interested also in a multipolar world." However, others such as Lukyanov and Inozemtsev took note of the imbalanced economic relationship between Russia and China, and expressed worry that Chinese investment in Central Asia portends to replace Russian dominance in the region's affairs and turn Russia into a junior partner. Similarly, disagreement existed over whether and how relations with India might affect efforts to improve ties with China.

Nevertheless, even with these recent discussions of Russia's new focus on Asia, substance may still be lacking. After all, Russia's closest economic and strategic relations are still with the U.S. and Europe, not with Asian countries. Take for example Russia's 2013 foreign policy white paper, pointed out Lukyanov, and one sees that the Asia Pacific region is merely item #75 on the agenda, far behind Russia's relations with post-Soviet states and the West. Thus, as Kuchins and Zevelev argue, "the status of the Western democratic market development model as well as the role of the United States and the West more broadly in international relations" remain the center of gravity in Russian debates over foreign policy and identity.

By Amy Hsieh, Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Political Science, George Washington University, and Research Assistant, Rising Powers Initiative.

1. Andrew C. Kuchins and Igor Zevelev, "Russia's Contested National Identity and Foreign Policy," in Henry R. Nau and Deepa M. Ollapally, eds., *Worldview of Aspiring Powers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
2. Ibid., p. 204.

The Sigur Center for Asian Studies is an international research center of The Elliott School of International Affairs at The George Washington University. Its mission is to increase the quality and broaden the scope of scholarly research and publications on Asian affairs, promote U.S.-Asia scholarly interaction and serve as the nexus for educating a new generation of students, scholars, analysts, and policymakers.