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The Integration of Non-Russian Servicemen in the Imperial, Soviet and Russian Army

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Thomas Gomart, Russian Civil- mMilitary Relations: Putin's Legacy

Washington D.C., Carnegie Endowment for
International Peace, 2008, 126 pages

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- 1 As Dale Herspring asserts in one of his works, “The Gorbachev period and the collapse of the former Soviet Union raised serious questions about many, if not most, of the traditional assumptions of Western scholars about the nature of politics in Russia”¹. Echoing this idea in the first pages of his Russian civil-military relations: Putin's legacy, Thomas Gomart states, “From abroad, the map of power in Russia is always difficult to read. It is nevertheless essential to do so”. Difficulty in reading this map has been compounded by the lack of interest experts paid to civil-military relations during Putin's years in office and the disadvantages of widespread analysis based solely on Western models. The reviewed work now fills this gap.
- 2 In his study, Gomart goes off the beaten path and incorporates siloviki² into the structure of civil-military relations. Although the author cogently justifies the necessity of such an approach, works dealing with the whole of siloviki in civil-military relations are rare³ (in contrast to the highly elaborated theme of Putin-FSB relations). This situation can be explained with the help of factors indicated by Gomart: the great significance of the so-called “banya factor” (“the baths factor”, i.e. informal, behind-the-scenes elements and procedures of civil-military relations) and the difficulty of grasping it, an unwillingness to give information on the part of the military and security services, an inability to find money for research, and a high degree of unpredictability typical of Russian power structures. Under the aforementioned circumstances, Gomart's book now offers arguably the broadest and most complete consideration of siloviki as part of civil-military relations under Putin.
- 3 In analyzing civil-military relations in Russia, the author concentrates on the distribution of power and decisionmaking processes within the Kremlin-military-security services triangle and how it reflects on foreign and domestic policy. This entails elaborating a wide range of topics.
- 4 Starting with an examination of the security community's structure (results are presented in the form of a useful and informative table on pages 28-29), Gomart points out its main peculiarities, namely: heterogeneity, divergence of its representatives' interests and internal rivalry and discord, especially between traditional armed forces and the rest of the security community stemming from the March 2003 reorganization. All this leads to the security community's inability to exert influence over political leadership, wherein Gomart assures, siloviki are more a media construct than an active and influential clan in politics.
- 5 Having thus defined the Russian security community, the author starts to investigate the way Putin built a relationship with that community during his two terms as President, noting the following: restriction of the security community's autonomy and reinforcement of the Kremlin's supremacy in decision making on foreign and security policies, predominance of security objectives over social requirements, increases in security spending without accountability, constant attention to military reform, active and careful media communication on the part of the President (especially in times of Kursk, Dubrovka and Beslan crises) and his using it as leverage within the security community. The combined effect of these influences led to security services becoming more active and open in public communication.
- 6 On the whole, some experts believe Putin's control of both the political and military institutions is harmonious. Others state degradation of the balance between political (in form of management) and civilian control (a system of checks and balances) can be noticed, for

the first type of balance prevails while the second is not developed at all. The only thought common to both groups is that Putin used the military as a tool to reinforce his power.

7 The next chapter is devoted to the widespread idea of militarization of the ruling elite under Putin. With the help of critiquing Kryshtanovskaia-White's conception, Gomart adduces one should better speak about FSB-isation of power, i.e. the coming to power of the second generation of siloviki (formed under Putin), who seek economic rather than political influence.

8 Further consideration of security services in modern Russia lets the author dispel the myth of the FSB, pointing out the role it now plays is not equal of that it had in the USSR. Nowadays, the FSB faces a range of challenges, including problems in recruiting and the disadvantageous position it has on the labour market. In addition, the FSB is marked by a profound inability to accept the consequences of the market economy, which hampers the Kremlin's reform efforts.

9 Dealing with the topic of military reform, Gomart highlights the power structures' unwillingness to fulfill measures according to Western standards. The author also distinguishes between the planned reform and how it was implemented, drawing attention to the rivalry between the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff which greatly influenced the reform.

10 The last chapter is devoted to the fight against international terrorism, which was introduced as a security objective after the Beslan hostage-taking event. This objective resulted in framing the Chechen conflict as a fight with terrorism and equating Chechen separatists to terrorists. Such an approach let Putin centralize his power, mobilize society and restrict civil liberties in the name of preserving national safety and unity.

11 It is important to emphasize that the analyzed work represents an example of systematic approach. Firstly, the aforementioned topics were investigated against a wide backdrop of interconnections between the military, presidential leadership, the security community, the business community and society. Secondly, underscoring that Russian civil-military relations are closely intertwined with strategic culture, Mr. Gomart enriches his work with an investigation into the historical, cultural, political and economic roots of both elements.

12 The empirical base of the study also merits mentioning, for it consists in large part of interviews conducted in Moscow with politicians, officers, officials, and experts between January 2005 and September 2007. Unfortunately the author does not give detailed information concerning the number of experts and their characteristics; however, the second part of the empirical base includes a great many foreign and Russian sources, while the notes and select bibliography contain several references for those seeking information on Russian civil-military relations.

13 In conclusion, although the logic of the text is not always clear and coherent, the examination gives a complete, detailed and realistic picture of civil-military relations under Putin. The attention the author pays to context, historical roots and cultural peculiarities of power structures in Russia make this book a must-read for all interested in the civil-military balance of power and distribution in modern Russia and the direction in which it's developing.

Pipss.org is grateful to Dave Westerberg who edited this book review.

Endnotes

1 Dale R. Herspring, *Russian Civil-Military Relations*, Indiana University Press, 1996, p. xv.

2 People coming from the power ministries, such as Ministry of Defense, Federal Security Service, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Federal Protection Service, and some other services.

3 One example "The *Siloviki* in Putin's Russia: Who they are and what they want" by Ian Bremmer & Samuel Charap, *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2006/2007, pp. 83-92, available at http://www.twq.com/07winter/docs/07winter_bremmer.pdf.

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