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other at a drug-store. Having figured that out, they happily set up a new date, arranging to meet at the “same place, same time.”

ENDNOTES

¹ Translated into English as ‘finger-tip-feeling’.

² Ручное управление (ruchnoe upravlenie).

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THE ‘POST-CRISIS ORDER’ IN THE MAKING: RUSSIA’S BALANCING ACTS

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The IMEMO Forecast 2017 (hereinafter ‘Forecast’) is broad in its analysis of international relations and of how Russia should position itself in a difficult context where the design of the new ‘post-order’ is still a rough draft. The document is sombre in its tone and assessment of the current state of international affairs. It looks into different geopolitical directions and identifies a lack of strategic vision, unilateralism, and re-nationalization of politics as dominant trends that undermine the potential for dialogue and enhancement of cooperative multilateral *fora*. To the West, Russia cannot

find active interlocutors as its 'partners' are seemingly preoccupied with domestic issues, from national elections to the management of Brexit (pp. 86–87). Ukraine has been almost erased from the public domain and is no longer central to relations between Russia and the West (p. 89). The freezing of the conflict in the Eastern regions of the country along with difficulties in democratizing the political elite offers little prospect for optimism. The sanctions are to remain in place and the “controlled destabilization” in the Donbass area precludes any fundamental change (Allison, 2014). The political will to progress on the implementation of the Minsk process also seems to be lacking. The consequence: Russia’s continued isolation from the West.

To the East, the ‘pivot to Asia’ policy (announced in 2014), which sought to balance Russia’s unbalanced relations with the West by intensifying its relations in the East, seems not to be fully rewarding. China is clearly gaining leverage, and the multilateral frameworks sought as a basis for finding more balance, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization or even the BRICS,² are “faltering” (p. 85). These frameworks do not seem able to: 1) provide for an alternative order to the Western-led one in its post-hegemonic phase; 2) offer a forum for mutual containment and enhanced cooperation between China and Russia; or 3) promote the benefits arising from globalizing dynamics. The unilateral initiatives of China outside these multilateral organizations, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and Russian attempts to bring the ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative into a closer cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Union in an enlarged common economic area show the limits of Russia’s Eastern balancing act, and how Moscow realized its limits in competing with the Chinese giant. The consequence: Russia’s weakness is exposed in the face of the economic weight of China.

RUSSIA’S BALANCING ACTS: THE QUEST FOR STATUS RECOGNITION

Nevertheless, despite its pessimistic tone the Forecast emphasizes Russia’s potential in the face of these unfavourable balances. The text reframes Russia’s positioning from that of weakness and isolation to that of the player which, in the face of the current challenges that cross-cut international relations, is forced to follow its “own way” (p. 85). This results from several different factors. First, the “lack of strategic vision, direction and certainty” (p. 86) from the West hinders Moscow’s ability to further engage in interaction or deepen its cooperative dialogue. In fact, the Forecast mentions how Russia’s policies toward the West have ranged from “heavy-handed” to “reconciliatory” approaches (pp. 85–86) in the face of a troubled West. Second, the efforts to deal with the main issues on the agenda, namely Syria, terrorism and Ukraine, which are understood as determining in Russia’s redefinition of relations with the West, navigate troubled waters. The isolation of Russia after Crimea’s annexation through sanctions, and its suspension from the G8 group³ are often mentioned as

illustrative in this respect. These dynamics have converged into a reading of the current order in Moscow as unbalanced and isolating for Russia.

However, these dynamics of isolation were ameliorated and reversed in Russia's view by its own military intervention in Syria. The Russian bombardments in September 2015 changed the course of events and rebalanced the forces in the field in favour of the Assad regime, bringing Moscow a seat at the negotiating table and even providing a way for it to seize the initiative in this respect. This new course was a game changer that Moscow has been using as leverage to project its image as that of a great power with a 'say' in international developments. The use of military force by Russia became part of the 'new normal', where Russia's criticism of unilateral decisions to use force, particularly regarding the United States' interventions, was replaced by a legitimizing discourse that sustains the reproduction of more assertive and militarized dynamics. In fact, the Forecast claims that a key priority for Moscow is to renegotiate arms control and disarmament agreements as a way to better oversee international security and better balance military and strategic affairs, while also underlining the dimension of these agreements as "an attribute of its world power position" (p. 99).

Nonetheless, if the gains resulting from the Syrian issue are welcomed in Russia, the costs associated with the new assertive course in foreign policy are both material and immaterial. They are material as they impact on a fragile economic situation, despite small signs of recovery. They are immaterial in the sense that Russia's goal of its international recognition as a major player was highly particular to this context, but its assertiveness did not fundamentally change the Western perceptions about Russia. What these dynamics mean in terms of the 'new post-crisis order' and its main trends as highlighted in the Forecast is the object of analysis in the next section.

THE 'NEW POST-CRISIS ORDER': POWER PROJECTION IN AN UNBALANCED INTERNATIONAL ORDER

The Forecast identifies two main trends in this 'new world order' in the making. The first trend is that of propaganda regaining a central place in foreign policy making. The second one is the domination of foreign policy by domestic interests in such a way that "*geopolitics is being politicized*" (p. 86, emphasis in original), i.e. used for domestic purposes. According to the Russian experts these trends undermine Russia's attempts at breaking new ground in defining new relations with its partners to the West, or in trying to counter negative implications arising from globalization dynamics. Russia has particularly accused Western countries of using propaganda to undermine its image in international politics. The creation of a section on 'fake news' on the official website of the Russian Ministry for Foreign Affairs is illustrative in this regard. The news about Russia's interference in electoral processes or support to far-right movements within European countries has been dismissed in Russia as part of the Western propaganda machine.

As told in the IMEMO Forecast, this contributes to exacerbating the image of Russia as a spoiler in international relations. The 'othering' dynamics implied here contribute to deepening the fissures in its relations with the West and to the growing distrust between the two sides. In this context, the Forecast argues that a 'new world order' is not really in the making, as old distrust and stereotypes prevail. Whether constructed, imagined or real, the images of Russia and the West that result from politics and actions do not reflect rapprochement or productive dialogue. These images are also not those of a balanced order as they underline difference instead of commonality or status equality. The Forecast refers to these dynamics as part of a "policy of parochialism with a touch of nationalism [which] clashes with the cosmopolitan world order so carefully constructed by technocrats" (p. 88). The unbalanced act resulting from these contradictory dynamics puts Russia in a difficult position: on the one hand it seeks to gain recognition in the international system, whereas on the other hand it faces serious constraints in this endeavour – not least the fact that it castigates the players in this order for misunderstanding, misrecognising and misrepresenting it.

Russia's well-known goal of getting other actors to recognise its status as a great power does not benefit from this pessimistic state-of-affairs. What Moscow gained in Ukraine was limited by the consequences of the sanctions and the erosion of its relations with the West. What it gained in Syria has resulted in its political involvement in the negotiations regarding Syria, but the high costs in both material and ideational terms should not be dismissed. The Munich Security Report (2017) asks whether we are heading to a "post-West or even post-order", but the IMEMO Forecast states that the current transition is very unlikely to herald a transition to a 'new world order' or even to offer concrete hints about how this new order could look.

GREATER FLEXIBILITY BUT NO GRAND BARGAIN

The Forecast also has an ambivalent emphasis on a "big bargain to come" (p. 86), implying that the players are getting prepared, while they also want to avoid any major shock after the long-term effects of the 2008 crisis, which are still felt around the globe. This adds to the impression that the Forecast gives when casting globalization as the main trend-setter for contemporary pessimism. The processes resulting from globalization are seen to have led to the global geopolitical and geo-economic crises as well as to a values-crisis, which has been running in parallel and deepening differences. The "situational partnerships" (p. 86) and the increasing centrality of "peripheral interests" (p. 86) attest to the short-term and ad-hoc reactions being sought to respond to the current challenges, though they hinder any potential for strategic foresight and for finding the right balances in this unbalanced international order. Nevertheless, Russia has also been taking advantage of these ad-hoc arrangements, which is implied, for example, when it refers to a partnership

that the Philippines proposed with Russia and China in a “format of convenience” (p. 118).

The network diplomacy and multilateral approaches which have been emphasized in Russian discourse have been complemented by informal and soft power mechanisms along with a militarization trend in foreign policy. Moreover, Syria has provided a window of opportunity for Russia to build new partnerships in the Middle East and try to rebalance its positioning in the area. The building of closer relations with Israel while still supporting the Palestinian state solution is a clear example of this. These different lines in Russian foreign policy, be they geopolitically oriented, regime-built or militarily grounded, bring novelty to the Russian approach, not so much in terms of the goals but more in terms of the means to achieve them. Power projection has thus become central. What is far from crystal clear is the extent to which Moscow will be capable of balancing such divergent interests and motivations in order to assure Russia’s status recognition amidst the uncertainty of the ‘post-crisis’ international ‘order’.

ENDNOTES

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² BRICS stands for Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

³ In 2017 Russia announced that it would permanently leave the G8.

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MORE OF THE SAME: THE WORLD ORDER KEEPS FAILING, AND RUSSIA STAYS THE COURSE OF DECLINE

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The striking feature of the IMEMO 2017 Forecast is the contrast between its basic assumption that global governance is experiencing a systemic failure and its pre-