

# Foreword

The first major public event under Russia's newly inaugurated President Dmitry Medvedev was a military parade in Moscow's Red Square on May 9, 2008. For the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the parade included military hardware, from the SS-25 Topol intercontinental ballistic missiles to the Tu-160 Blackjack strategic bombers. The message to the outside world was clear: Russia is back, also as a military power, with a global nuclear reach. The message to the domestic audience was no less obvious: the armed forces are the ultimate symbol of the state's power, in which every citizen can take pride. *The army and the people are one*, as they used to repeat in Soviet days. Among the ordinary Muscovites, watching the low-altitude flybys of the bombers, fighters, and tankers, some grumbled at the costly extravaganza; many more approved of it.

The Victory Day parade was also Medvedev's first function as commander-in-chief. Minutes after his inauguration two days before, he was presented with the "nuclear briefcase," the modern version of the scepter and orb, and thus became the supreme boss of the million men under arms in Russia. During the eight-year tenure of his predecessor, Vladimir Putin (2000–2008), presidential control over the armed services was strengthened. The military had to accept the reduction of the role of the General Staff in favor of the office of the Minister of Defense. The minister, in turn, is no longer a career officer; of the last two, one was a political operative, and the other one a financial manager.

On the other hand, Putin's presidency was marked by the ascendancy of the representatives of the power sector, i.e., military, police, and especially security

services officers, collectively known as *siloviki*, giving the political system the air of a militocracy. Rather than the state and society controlling its guardians and keepers, it was the keepers occupying many important positions in the state and the economy. Putin, however, did not build a national security state. Formal institutions were trumped by the informal networks.

Under Putin, the mission of military reform was declared accomplished. The United States was de facto reinstated as Russia's potential adversary, even as the word *partnership* was reserved for summit declarations. The resumption, for the first time since the end of the Cold War, of high-profile strategic air patrols to the United States, United Kingdom, and Japanese borders overshadowed a rather modest program to modernize the military's rapidly aging arsenals. Conscription was retained, but its term was cut in half to reflect the shortfall in manpower. Hazing continued unabated, but with fewer people complaining as the Russian military lived down to the description of the Red army as a workers-and-peasants force.

These issues, and many more, are researched in depth by Thomas Gomart, a leading French student of Russia and its relations with the West. From his vantage position at the Institut français de relations internationales in Paris, and through his many trips to Russia, Gomart has been able to confront the contemporary theory of civil-military relations and the realities of today's Russia. He rightly focuses on the Putin presidency, which has given the country's institutions their present shape, but he reaches deeper into Russia's post-communist and Soviet history, and subjects the evidence he has amassed to the rich template of Western theory.

It is my pleasure to recommend this book by Thomas Gomart to all those who are interested in the transformation of Russia, which is still an open-ended process, and which remains an important factor not only for Russia's direct neighbors, but to the international system more broadly, including in its strategic component. The Russian army, which for decades had opposed the West, and did not quite become its ally since the end of that confrontation, merits sustained attention. As the old saying goes, it is never as strong as it wants to look, but is never as feeble as it at times appears.

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