

Introduction

From abroad, the map of power in Russia is always difficult to read. It is nevertheless essential to do so in order to assess the broader objectives of a country that is in the process of reestablishing itself on the international stage. Today, following Vladimir Putin's two terms as president, Russia appears to be a much more assertive country, one that is quite strong and impressive in macroeconomic terms. Its robust growth stands in stark contrast with the Yeltsin period. At the same time, Russia has regained genuine freedom of action on the international stage: The Russian comeback is one of the most significant transformations in international relations since 2000.

Conceptions of the distribution of power are frequently centered upon the Kremlin and are crisscrossed by closely linked forces. At first glance, Russia's current regime is characterized by neither a separation of powers nor a clear distinction between public policies but, on the contrary, by the merging of responsibilities and confusion over the competing levels of leadership—all concealed behind a hierarchy and a recentralization of power.

To understand Russian governance today, it is essential to understand the roots of its "specificity." Russian specificity can be defined as a particular type of governance inherited from both the czarist and Soviet past and consisting of power concentrated in the leader's hands; political implementation of law; refusal to establish clearly identified counterweights; and the leader's unwillingness to delegate authority. Russia draws a large portion of its specificity from tangled networks: political, judicial, media-related, economic, and security.

Underlying all this are civil-military relations—basically defined as the chain of political and military means and ends implemented by the state at the

highest level. These civil-military relations directly affect the decision-making process within the ruling elite, as well as the links between the presidential leadership and the security community, the business community, and finally, society. The relationship also affects the structure of the security community and, consequently, the atmosphere within the elite and society.

As a nuclear superpower, the USSR allocated the majority of its resources to the security community—the armed forces, the security services, and the ministries in charge of security, whose primary purpose was the protection of the state—and granted it a privileged rank in society. This book is based on the assumption that the collapse of the USSR led to a socioeconomic transition that was as far-reaching as it was brutal, but that avoided genuine politico-military transformation, and that much of Russia's specificity can be explained through the disjunction of these two processes. From this point of view, understanding the evolution of civil-military relations in Russia is indispensable to understanding the "Putin system" and how it will define Russia in the years to come.

This book aims to investigate Putin's legacy on civil-military relations in Russia to decipher the impact of the relationship on how power was distributed while Putin served as president, as well as to anticipate changes beyond 2008. Civil-military relations are deeply rooted in Russian strategic culture—they were part of a specific national mind-set in preparing, maintaining, or employing force to achieve political objectives long before Putin came to power. Conversely, even incremental changes in the balance between the civil and military spheres are one of the most efficient ways to alter the strategic culture. Dealing with civil-military relations consequently implies a dual-track approach.

As Putin's handpicked successor, Dmitry Medvedev assumes the presidency of the Russian Federation—with Putin as his prime minister—civil-military relations will be at the core of his leadership due to the deep-rooted tradition of the personalization of power in Russia and the consistently sensitive relationship between the presidency and the security community in charge of protecting the state from both internal and external threats. With this in mind, this book presents a threefold argument by analyzing power as a capacity, both at the individual and institutional levels, to mobilize and direct moral and material resources.

Putin's legacy on civil-military relations is far from insignificant. Compared with Boris Yeltsin, who paid no attention to this issue except in relation to Chechnya, Vladimir Putin was seen by the security community as a professional, a sort of *primus inter pares*. There is no doubt that he succeeded in

achieving significant progress, both directly and indirectly. Putin's leadership was characterized by the search for a new institutional balance within the security community and the judicious involvement of the presidential leadership. However, Putin also believed that any attempt to implement a policy should respect Russian political culture. In other words, being pragmatic in his approach to policy and open in his approach to problem solving, Vladimir Putin was very cautious when it came to making changes, especially in the security field.

This leads to the second argument, which is a domestic one. The relationship between the civil and military institutions accurately reflects Putin's power, both in terms of ambitions and limitations, and is key to understanding his leadership because of the great difficulties he encountered while trying to change an idiosyncratic bureaucracy. Implementing reform and changing institutional balances is a slow, painful, and frustrating process everywhere. In Russia, having a clear vision of the relationship between the civil and military spheres helps to illustrate how Putin's policies were implemented by providing insight into the official wish to reform at the top versus the reluctance to reform coming from different parts of the security community. In other words, an analysis of the relationship serves to fuel the debate on the conservatism and authoritarianism that have prevailed in Russian politics under Putin.

The final argument is primarily related to external issues. The elite and large parts of the population consider Russia's great-power status on the international scene as fundamental to their identity. Many years after the collapse of the USSR, Russia continues to promote a foreign policy rationale based largely on the notion of *derzhavnichestvo*—that Russia is either a great power or it is nothing. Civil-military relations are a key element of this view. There is certainly a parallel between the evolution of civil and military relations under Putin and the evolution of Russian foreign policy: Both processes have been, and will continue to be, closely linked.

For many reasons, experts on Russia ignored civilian-military relations during the past few years. That is not to say that nothing was done in this field. The truth, as will be shown, is quite the opposite, but it means that many external observers have preferred to focus on the other characteristics of Putin's power. In comparison, civil and military relations were much more closely scrutinized during the 1990s. This is understandable in light of numerous events and factors: an attempted coup in August 1991 by those nostalgic for the Soviet era; an October 1993 parliamentary revolt led by General Alexander Vladimirovich Rutskoy that was suppressed by tanks; the role of

military personnel in political life (advocated openly by General Alexander Lebed and covertly by General Alexander V. Kozhakov, who was more than just Yeltsin's bodyguard); the weakness of Boris Yeltsin's power; and particularly the first Chechnya war (1994–1996).

The development of the balance between civilian and military institutions was therefore presented as one of the determining factors in the transition from the communist system toward a democratic regime, enabling Russian and Western models to converge. The importance accorded to them was reinforced by Russia's former satellites in Europe, for whom the transition was accompanied by a complete overhaul of their own civil-military balance, with the double incentive of emancipation from Moscow and integration into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Although the subject of civil-military relations did not fully disappear with Vladimir Putin's coming to power in March 2000, there are three main reasons it was not given the same importance in analyses of the Russian regime during his two terms.

First, Putin's wish to "destroy the oligarchs as a class" was a brilliant example of successful political communication. As a highly popular slogan inside Russia, it drew the political class, the business community, the media, the expert community together, along with public opinion. The battle against the oligarchy, combined with the redefinition of center-to-regions relations, was presented by politicians and the media, both within Russia and abroad, as being at the heart of the stabilization process and the reinforcement of presidential authority carried out by Putin and his close associates. Talk of the "vertical of power," the "dictatorship of law," and "managed democracy" saturated the Kremlin's discourse during Putin's regime, and also—indeed even more so—analyses of the regime. No doubt this diverted attention from more perennial traits of the organization of power—traits stemming from the very nature of civil-military relations.

Second, Putin emphasized from the outset the need to reform the military, both for operational and social reasons, taking into account the degradation in the officers' living conditions—not to mention those of conscripts—during the Yeltsin years. Since the fall of the USSR, this reform was the third attempt at overhauling the armed forces, coming after ones initiated by Pavel Grachev in 1992 and Igor Sergeyev in 1997. The latest plan to reform the military, prepared by Sergey Ivanov, was endorsed by the Duma in July 2003. Its implementation was one of the main issues at stake in civil-military relations from 2004 to 2008. The resumption of military operations in the Caucasus in August 1999 and the tacit support of the military were decisive factors in

Putin's incredibly rapid rise to power. His plan to restore Russian power on the international stage involved regaining military credibility vis-à-vis the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and, to a lesser extent, in relation to other great or regional powers. This plan was strongly supported by the security community, which had been in constant crisis under Yeltsin.

Third, Putin manifested his personal interest in military matters, and security issues more broadly, which shaped his vision of the world as much as they did the organization of his power. To some extent, he considered himself a professional in this business. Incidentally, under Putin, the center of the debate shifted from the nature of civil-military relations, which is mainly a political issue, to the details of military reform, which are a more technical matter. This shift—intended to give the Russian Federation a military tool adapted to its international and regional ambitions—did not happen purely by chance.

In this sense, if discussion of reform remains focused on operational implications, the issue of civil-military relations is outdated, having been severed from the transition process by both the Russian elite and the expert community. This lack of interest explains in part the numerous comments, either incomplete or biased, on Putin's regime, which is mostly presented as a new form of authoritarianism. In the eyes of a good number of commentators, especially in the West, Putin will always be tainted by his original affiliation with the intelligence services. Yet this is not enough to explain his trajectory or his choices.

The numerous analyses focusing on oligarchs, the restriction of civil liberties, and the control of the main opposition forces have resulted not so much in the army and security services' being neglected, but in their being perceived as connected to the consolidation of Putin's power. Yet this process, while indisputably explained in part by Putin's personal leanings, is also the product of the Russian system's structural constraints. The system encourages a highly personalized power structure, in which all the levers of power and enormous resources are at the leader's disposal.

The problem is that this concentration of power induces a confusion of responsibilities below the presidential level. An analysis of how the different levels of responsibility interact and of the outcome of such interactions should enable an assessment of Putin's capacity for decision making or, on the contrary, his tendency to be indecisive and careful.

The aim of this book is neither to absolve Putin and his entourage from responsibility for the legacy of civil-military relations nor to attribute it directly to them. The aim is to highlight the constitutive nature of civil-

military relations, despite their difficult definition, within the distribution of power in a country where political and military elites have always been deeply intertwined. Western analysts seem to have been slow to understand that, contrary to its former satellites, Moscow could not completely reconstruct its balance of state-military relations from scratch: Russia had to confront its Soviet heritage. In 2008, it remains vital to consider the civilian-military interface, as it affects the security policy that shapes the domestic and foreign policies of a country still in search of its identity.

This book also aims to go beyond the traditional dualism between the Kremlin and the military usually made in studying civil-military relations by introducing a third element: the security services. Putin's actions have resulted in a balance among these three institutional players. Though often overlooked, another key element—the state of war—comes into play here. Whatever the power in question, the decision to use force is never neutral. Until hostages were taken at a school in Beslan in September 2004, Russian authorities presented their activities in Chechnya as an antiterrorist operation. Doing so exacerbated tensions among the Kremlin, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the security services due to issues such as military and civilian losses, collateral damage, regional instability, and international repugnance.

Since Beslan, the authorities have considered themselves to be at war. In other words, despite the Kremlin's discourse on successful "stabilization" in Chechnya, the second Chechnya war was a powerful event that affected Putin's regime from the beginning. Formulating an accurate assessment of the situation in Chechnya remains difficult. Nevertheless, it is worth remembering that during Putin's tenure, the relationship between the civil and military spheres developed against a background of asymmetric warfare. And it is worth questioning how this conflict galvanized other parts of the North Caucasus, such as Ingushetia, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Karachay-Cherkessia, where the situation has been steadily deteriorating.

Despite the gradual decline of interest, the relationship between civil and military institutions has maintained a central role in Russia and will continue to be of interest in the future. Understanding this relationship is indispensable for any prospective work on Russia in regard to three key spheres: regime "democratization," which involves subjecting generals, officers, and soldiers, as well as members of the security services, to the same regulations as citizens; framing security policy and the implications it will have for neighboring countries and other powers; and, finally, the atmosphere prevailing within the elite and Russian society. That is why the issue of civil-military relations

merits continued interest, both to anticipate regime developments and to shape the attitude that should be adopted by the regime's main international partners. As with Putin and now with Medvedev, the Russian leader always faces the dilemma of whether to stabilize the state and consequently the country by defending the interests of the ruling minority or to transform the state to support the nascent civil society.

The resolution of this dilemma clearly depends on the evolution of civil-military relations. This leads to the first main question: What exactly is the current state of the relationship of those two formidable institutions in Russia? Specifically, has Putin's leadership through his two terms of office resulted in a rupture—be it rhetorical or real—in the nature of the relationship? By focusing on Putin, these questions call *a priori* for descriptive assessments of his personal position and, by extension, that of his administration in developments within the security community.

In practical terms, such an examination of the relationship between the civil and military spheres involves an investigation into two main aspects of the decision-making process. The first is functional and concerns the operation of the chain of command, which required fundamental reform at the end of the Yeltsin period. At that time, orders could be given at the presidential level, without any implementation at the operational level.

The second is political and concerns the use of force. Force is the basis of any security activity. In theory, the political authority should be able to fix military targets in accordance with objectives and to modulate their intensity. The use of force also implies the acceptance of its immediate effects: that military force kills people and destroys things. In practice, however, it is extremely difficult to regulate the intensity of force according to the objectives being pursued. These difficulties have been particularly apparent in Chechnya. In addition, it appears that all the institutional actors in Russia remain reluctant to openly accept the consequences of using force.

The connection between presidential authority and civil-military relations is worth a reexamination. Undoubtedly, though often unconsciously, debates on models of civil and military relations influence our understanding of current developments. There is, however, a risk of applying Western analytical models inappropriate to the Russian reality. Nevertheless, such theoretical or historical models are indispensable for measuring the discrepancy between models that are compatible with a democratic regime and the activities of a large number of Russian officials—indeed, the Russian system as a whole.

The second main question underlying this book is to what extent the concentration of power at the presidential level is accompanied by overrepresenten-

tation of the military and the security services in the decision-making process. For better or worse, the Putin years were characterized by an alleged “militarization” of the ruling class. The argument concerning the regime’s militarization will be discussed at length in chapter 3. The close involvement of the security services in civil-military relations renders the notion of militarization even more complicated within the Russian context.

This question is paradoxical, as it implies that in order to modify the balance of power in his favor, Putin supported the rise to power of the so-called *siloviki*. In Russian, “sila” means “force,” and the term *siloviki* applies to the people coming from the power ministries (*silovie ministerstva*) such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs or the Ministry of Defense and from power structures (*silovie strukturi*) such as the Federal Security Service (FSB). The term *siloviki* can also refer to a specific “clan” in Russian politics. However, its complete makeup remains a mystery. *Siloviki* as a group are undoubtedly more heterogeneous than homogeneous. But the inability to distinguish the institutional origins of actors described as *siloviki* is part of the problem in analyzing the distribution of power. The mere notion of *siloviki* is highly debatable and should be clarified. In this book, the notion is limited to people coming from power ministries and power structures, which include:

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID)
- Ministry of Justice (*MinYust*)
- Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD)
- Ministry for Civil Defense, Emergency Situations, and Disaster Relief (MChS)
- Ministry of Defense (MO)
- Federal Security Service (FSB)
- Federal Border Service (FPS)
- Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR)
- Federal Protection Service (FSO)
- Federal Customs Service (FTS)
- Federal Drug Control Service (FSKN)
- Main Directorate for Special Programs (GUSP)
- Presidential Directorate for Administrative Affairs (UDPRF)

The issue of the *siloviki* certainly invites scrutiny of Putin’s methods for reinforcing his own power: To what extent has he relied on the *siloviki* as a whole or on different groups that were completely or partly staffed by former colleagues from the intelligence services or the office of the mayor of St. Petersburg? In terms of operating, to what extent have Putin and members of

his inner circle used “international terrorism” as an excuse to centralize power? A lot has been said and written about the *siloviki*, implying that they are responsible for the trend toward conservatism and the centralization of power. This vision of a conspiracy is widespread both in Russia and abroad. On the other hand, one can argue that the personalized nature of power as well as the way in which Yeltsin dealt with—or more precisely did not deal with—civil-military relations could have induced a sort of political vacuum that people prepared to protect the regime—whoever its leader—felt compelled to fill.

In this context, the appointment of Sergey Ivanov as the first “civilian” minister of defense in March 2001 and his promotion to deputy prime minister in November 2005 were significant developments, given that he hails from the intelligence services and at one time was seen as a possible successor to Putin. After he advanced to first deputy prime minister in February 2007, Anatoly Serdyukov became minister of defense. Such a succession of “civilian” defense ministers is particularly significant. Conversely, another question deserves to be raised: Did the desire for reform on the part of Putin and his defense minister come up against inertia and division within the security community? Was this inertia combined with apathy for military matters on the part of the civilian elite and the public? These questions are all the more pertinent because, officially, military reform had been completed in October 2003.

For these reasons, this book concentrates on three pivotal aspects of the relationship between the civil and military spheres: a sort of “sociology” of power at the highest level of the state; decision-making methods resulting in the use of force; and *derzhavnichestvo*’s impact on the Kremlin’s international ambitions. However, this book is not an academic study of the security community as such or a thorough analysis of its doctrine. This book will refrain from dealing with larger issues such as Russian security policy and military reform. The study is empirical and descriptive in its approach and is based on a large set of interviews conducted in Moscow with politicians, officers, officials, and experts between January 2005 and September 2007.

In short, this work aims to understand the very informal and rather unpredictable nature of civil-military relations in Russia and the consequent organization of power, which under Medvedev and beyond will certainly remain in constant flux. This combination of the informal and the unpredictable, which is so characteristic of the Russian system, helps explain many of the misunderstandings between Russia and other nations.

It is precisely the relationship between Russia and other nations that justifies this policy-oriented examination. Because of its assertiveness, Russia is

seen as rejecting so-called Western standards of development. Relying on its own capabilities, Russia officially intends to control both the time frame and the form of its development. This position leads many observers to fear a resurgent Russia with the potential to once again be a direct military threat to the West. This book does not support that view even if risks certainly exist.

Observing Russia from Europe, it is always highly sensitive to focus on the links between Russia and its neighbors. Russia's recent behavior could be interpreted as setting out on a neo-imperialist path, aggressively investing in foreign markets, increasing its military expenditure, seeking to dominate its near abroad. In addition, it is often said that Russia wants to thwart Western influence by driving a wedge between the United States and the European Union, as well as among the EU member states.

Being at war and having regained world-power status partly through energy, Russia has entered a phase of unexpected economic expansion and political assertiveness. Part of the international concern about Russia is whether this trend could result in stable relations, and whether Russia would eventually accept the constraints of global market conventions. Essentially, Russia needs to avoid direct confrontation. However, the Russian leadership will face the tensions inherent in pursuing a policy charted between aggressive promotion of Russia's interests and the desire to be seen as a reliable partner.

In the Western conception of international relations, there is a sort of *doxa* that holds that an undemocratic regime is a threat not only to its own society and neighbors, but also to its partners. The general assumption is quite well known: The strengthening of internal, domestic power will, sooner or later, translate into the strengthening of external power. In this view, being—by Western standards—abnormal politically, economically, and strategically, Russia is not able to pursue a predictable foreign policy.

Difficulties establishing partnerships on the Russian side and difficulties empathizing with Russia on the Western side can largely be explained by the divergence in the two sides' concepts of how to balance civil and military interests. Russian analysis on the topic concentrates on the means of reacting to a system of threats and maintaining the integrity of the state. Western analysis concentrates on the democratization process with the clear subordination of the military and the security services to civilian power. In the euphoria of the transition years, the Russian concept of civil-military relations was supposed to become similar to the Western one. It is time to accept that this has not been the case and to anticipate the consequences.