

Title:

What Russia Teaches Us Now: Re-conceptualizing “Power” in International Relations

Abstract:

Russia presents a puzzle for theories of socio-economic development and modernization and their relationship to state power in international politics. In the last twenty-five years it has been re-classified by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development as an “upper middle income” country because of its significant rise in average Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, yet it has an adult life expectancy (at 70.1 years) just lower than that of Bangladesh, according to the 2015 United Nations Human Development Report.^[i] But a simple tallying of Russia’s importance in the global economy, its human capital, the size of its military, and its unpredictable politics would hardly convince an observer of its power over other countries’ decisions in international politics. In 2016 it had a 3.15 percent share of global gross domestic product, compared to 15.59 % for the United States, 17.76% for China, and 7.23 % for India, according to the International Monetary Fund. At an estimated 144.1 million people (including the annexed territory of Crimea), Russia had a population size already less than half of the United States (321.4 million), only a tenth of China’s (1.37 billion), and India’s (1.31 billion), but with flat to negative growth prospects. Russia also ranked a distant third (at 70.3 billion US) behind the United States (at US\$611 billion) and China (US\$215 billion) in military spending, despite moves to modernize its military beginning in 2008.

Despite all of this, Russia is again a central player in international affairs. From its seizure of the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine in 2014, to its rapid deployment of its military to bolster the embattled regime of Bashar Assad in Syria in 2015, to its alleged interference in the United States elections in 2016, and the release of some of the material gathered to WikiLeaks, Russia has reasserted itself as a major global power. How has this happened? Is contemporary Russia strong or weak? What are the determinants of state power in the international politics of the twenty-first century? I will argue that a proper understanding of Russian capabilities demands a multi-dimensional conceptualization of power in international relations, rather than a traditional realist means based approach, that relies on a simple tallying of the traditional 3 m’s of money, military strength and manpower.

Does this sound ok?

Sorry for the need for a special prod!

Mea culpa,

K

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[i] See “Table 1: Human Development Index and Its Components,” in 2015 UN Human Development Report, p. 208-2011, available at: http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr_2015_statistical_annex.pdf (accessed September 7, 2016).