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RUSSIA'S REVIVAL IN GLOBAL AFFAIRS: WILL THERE BE NEW CONFLICTS WITH THE WEST?

Abstract

Russia, nowadays, vigorously displays its strength in global affairs, which it could not do after the fall of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev made this possible by recovering the country's former standing and equitable place in the world arena. The country's reemergence has resulted in growing confrontations with the West. The Russo-Georgian War and the Ukraine Crisis deeply worsened Russia-West relations. There are other differences on, for instance, Syrian war, expansion of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Venezuela. The United States' presidential election 2016 has also allegations of Russian meddling. Russia is now trying to form new alliances at regional and global levels, including expansion of relations with depressed Western allies to counterbalance Western preponderance. Albeit Russia and West both suffer from economic slump, their belligerent rhetoric and military postures go on where neither is willing to give up. Russian reassertion and Russia-West antagonism sometimes create fear of full-scale conflicts. This article examines the reemergence of post-USSR Russia under Putin and Medvedev, mutual perceptions of and interactions between Russia and the West, Russia's role as a global player in recent times, and if Russia's resurgence will create new conflicts. It is a qualitative research, drawing from secondary sources. It mainly argues that there are reasons both for and against conflict, but neither Russia nor the West can endure a real war.

1. Introduction

Russia for some years has been re-exerting its influence in various issues worldwide. In doing so, the country has resorted to diplomacy as well as military means. Its stances have often gone in contrast to Western stances in several cases, including Kosovo War, Iranian nuclear programme talks, the current Syrian Civil War and untiring support for the Assad government. In the Russo-Georgian War (2008) and annexation of Crimea (2014), Russia used extensive military strength. Such practice is also visible in the Syrian war while diplomacy has been widely used in Kosovo War and Iran nuclear deal framework. In recent times, a serious debate about Russian interference in the United States' (US) presidential election of November 2016 is continuing. These manoeuvres may seem to regain Russia's old esteem as a global power, placing it on an equal footing with other major powers, notably the US, the

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European Union (EU), and their allies, but at the same time, are creating larger, in many cases, perilous distance between them as well.

After the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), many countries emerged and the eastern flank of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) seemed secure. The successor state, Russian Federation/Russia, faced severe disarray in every sector, and did not seem much of a danger like it used to be. For almost a decade, Russia went through grave domestic instability, leading to lesser exercise of influence on global stage. The country entered the Partnership for Peace with NATO with whom it had been at loggerheads throughout the Cold War era. It received Western monetary and logistic assistance after 1991; Russia also undertook different reform programmes. There was expectation of improved Russia-West relations notwithstanding difference on, e.g., the Kosovo War. However, things began changing with the arrival of Vladimir Putin on the scene. The West nowadays considers Russia as a big concern, who is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and continues to brandish muscles despite under hefty sanctions from the West. Besides exercising military and political clout, Russia has presently been broadening and diversifying its foreign relations. It is a member of various regional and global organisations, notably the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) group and the New Development Bank (NDB), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and Eurasian Development Bank (EDB), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), an intergovernmental military alliance among Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan. Russia-China relations are longstanding, extensive, and day by day, assuming robust form. Other countries Russia is expanding relations with are Turkey and Pakistan, two important Western allies whom it did not have good relations with during the Cold War. At present, they have expressed stronger will to expand their existing bilateral relations.

Russia's growing assertiveness in world affairs has been alarming Western countries who remain highly suspicious about the country's intentions. Some European countries fear that Russia is trying to divide the EU itself.¹ Most of the then Eastern bloc states (e.g., Baltic republics, Bulgaria, Georgia, Poland) are now virulently anti-Russian while the US' continuous and growing military presence on Russian borders is further heightening tensions. Russia also replies by increasing its force mobilisation near borders.² Particularly, after the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the resultant ongoing conflict in Ukraine, several East European and all Baltic

¹ Stephen R. Covington, *Putin's Choice for Russia*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, August 2015, p. 4.

² Luke Harding, "NATO and Russia Playing Dangerous Game with Military Build-up", *The Guardian*, 27 October 2016.

states have become highly fearful of a possible Russian invasion.³ Out of such fears, two neutral Scandinavian countries, Finland and Sweden were considering joining NATO as members, albeit are still to become so in reality. Nonetheless, they increased defence cooperation with NATO and both countries signed host-nation support agreements with the group.⁴

Given this backdrop, some questions may normally arise. What was Russia's condition after the fall of the USSR? How did Vladimir Putin's rise help restore the country's domestic stability and international stature? Is Russia now a global power again, in light of its actions, or how influential has Russia been in various international issues after Putin came into power? Will new conflicts emerge with the country's growing reassertion of itself in global affairs?

This paper is an attempt to find answers to such questions. It is qualitative in nature, relying totally on secondary sources - books, newspapers and online articles. It has five sections. The first section is the introduction. The second section describes Russia's situation after the fall of the USSR, Putin's rise to power, his domestic reforms and consolidation of Russia's position as a global player to be reckoned with. Contributions of Dmitry Medvedev, another member of the *United Russia* party, are described as well. The third section discusses whether Russia today is really a global power, the country's stances and actions undertaken regarding several important issues. The fourth tries to shed some light on causes for and against Russia-West conflicts, given Russia's growing reassertion in the world arena. The fifth section concludes the paper.

2. Russia after the Fall of the USSR

After the USSR's fall in 1991, political and military instability began inflicting heavy damages on Russia. The economy was in wholesale turmoil. Secessionist movements in the Caucasus became more violent. Political volatility was also grave. President Boris Yeltsin had to deal with a troubled economy, the constitutional crisis (1993), breakout of the First Chechen War (1994) - all simultaneously. From 1991 up to mid-1999, Russia received seven heads of government including Yeltsin himself. The constitutional crisis of 1993 stemmed from a power struggle and political standoff between Yeltsin and the Russian parliament. Ultimately, Yeltsin prevailed with support from the military.⁵ Russia inherited the foreign debt of the USSR amounting US\$66

³ Stephanie Pezard, Andrew Radin, Thomas S. Szayna and F. Stephen Larrabee, *European Relations with Russia: Threat Perceptions, Responses, and Strategies*, Santa Monica, California, USA: Rand Corporation, 2017, p. 6.

⁴ Stephen Larrabee, Peter A. Wilson and John Gordon IV, *The Ukrainian Crisis and European Security: Implications for the United States*, Santa Monica, California, USA: Rand Corporation, 2015, p. 36.

⁵ Christina M. McPherson, "Russia's 1993 Constitution: Rule of Law for Russia or Merely a Return to Autocracy", *Hastings Constitutional Law Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 155, Fall 1999, p. 157.

billion⁶ and that reached US\$83 billion by early 1992.⁷ Wide-ranging socioeconomic reform initiatives undertaken during Yeltsin proved ineffective. Continuing weakness of the economy led also to sharp decline in military spending which in turn resulted in reducing troops' numbers, decommissioning large quantities of weapons and stalling new developments. The military was still strong but, amid the persistent disorder, was peacefully disbanded. With the Union absent then, newly independent countries acquired their individual shares of armed forces and equipment stationed during the Soviet era; like Ukraine and Belarus claimed Soviet military assets on their lands.⁸ Conversely, NATO began eastward expansion and progressively, countries belonging to the erstwhile Eastern bloc, the Warsaw Pact, and three (Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro) out of five countries emerging from the breakup of Yugoslavia became NATO members, causing profound concerns to Russia who viewed (and still does) this as encirclement by NATO. In 1994, Russia joined the NATO Partnership for Peace.⁹ Meanwhile, the First Chechen War (1994-96) ended in a degrading defeat¹⁰ for Russia. The country had become a mere shadow of its former superpower-self and could do little to check Western intrusion into its own sphere of influence. Sufferings worsened in August 1998 when Russia faced a devastating economic collapse with grave repercussions. The government defaulted on both domestic and foreign debts. President Yeltsin dismissed Premier Kiriyenko and his entire cabinet. Nevertheless, the country made quick recuperation from these debacles and attained notable progress in its overall economic performance in recent years.

2.1 Rise of Putin

Situations began to display slow upturn for Russia when Vladimir Putin came into power. Although his current political party, the *United Russia*, was formed much later after his entry into politics in Moscow, he and his party members have helped substantially recover Russia's previous standing of a respectable global force. He at first served as Russian Prime Minister from August 1999 to May 2000. After Yeltsin's resignation in December 1999, Putin worked as the acting president. Since the founding of *United Russia* in early December 2001, its members have mostly

⁶ Boris Yeltsin, "Russia: From Rebirth to Crisis to Recovery", in James M. Boughton, *Tearing Down Walls: The International Monetary Fund 1990-1999*, Washington D. C., USA: International Monetary Fund (IMF), February 2012, p. 288.

⁷ Sergey Zhavoronkov, "Has the West Forsaken Russia's Love? Part 2, Intersection Project", July 2015, available at intersectionprojecteu.eu/article/russia-world/has-west-forsaken-russia's-love-part-2, accessed on 20 May 2016.

⁸ Dmitry V. Trenin, "Conclusion: Gold Eagle, Red Star", in Steven E. Miller and Dmitry Trenin (eds.), *The Russian Military: Power and Policy (American Academy Studies in Global Security)*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA: The MIT Press, 2004, p. 217.

⁹ Harinder Sekhon, *Russia, Europe and the United States: Emerging Power Play*, New Delhi, India: Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), 2016, p. 10.

¹⁰ Tim Youngs, *The Conflict in Chechnya*, Research Paper 00/14, House of Commons Library, February 2000, p. 16.

dominated and remained prominent in Russian politics — namely Putin, Medvedev, Viktor Zubkov, Sergey Lavrov, Sergey Shoygu, Anton Siluanov, Vyacheslav Volodin, among others, have served in different important capacities. Putin restored Russia's political stability, mitigated the economic slump, bolstered economic and military might.¹¹ Medvedev, as president, revitalised the country's status as a recognised military power in the Russo-Georgian War.¹² Russia's commendable economic growth attained under their leadership added significantly to its growing political-military importance in world affairs,¹³ while Putin remains a highly popular and the most influential figure in Russia. Outside Russia too, he has frequently been featured as a commanding and competent leader, *e.g.*, by the *Time* magazine and the *Forbes* ranked him as the most powerful individual of the world.

Putin has been credited as the main architect of Russia's resurgence. His first major appointment in Moscow was as the deputy chief of Presidential Property Management Department from June 1996 to March 1997. In July 1998, he became the director of Federal Security Service (FSB). He became premier in August 1999, president in March 2000, and reelected as president in March 2004. Due to bar in the Russian constitution for a third consecutive presidency,¹⁴ Putin did not compete for that post in the 2008 election and instead became the premier, while Medvedev became president. In the 2012 election, Putin was elected as president for the third time and Medvedev as premier for the second time.

2.2 Domestic Reforms

Since becoming Russia's premier in 1999, Putin has helped speedy, efficient restoration of Russia's internal order and international prestige from the post-USSR mayhem. His first noteworthy success in state affairs came with effectively handling the Second Chechen War. When he took office in May 2000 as the president of Russia, the country's armed forces had finished major military actions and secured firm control over areas of fighting.¹⁵

Putin focused on rebuilding state power and economic progress through integration with global economy. In his annual address of 2002 to the Federal Assembly, he said Russia must use the advantages of the new state of world economy and integrate

¹¹ Ingmar Oldberg, *Russia's Great Power Strategy under Putin and Medvedev*, Occasional Papers, No. 1, 2010, Swedish Institute of International Affairs, Stockholm, Sweden, 2010, p. 2.

¹² Richard J. Krickus, *Medvedev's Plan: Giving Russia a Voice but not a Veto in a New European Security System*, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, USA: Strategic Studies Institute (SSI), US Army War College, 2009, p. 1.

¹³ Kathryn Stoner-Weiss, "Russia and the Global Financial Crisis: the End of Putinism?", *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2009, p. 103.

¹⁴ Constitution of the Russian Federation, Chapter 4, Article 81, Clause 3.

¹⁵ Pavel K. Baev, "Putin's War in Chechnya: Who steers the Course?", *PONARS Policy Memo 345*, International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, November 2004, p. 3.

into that. Foreign direct investments in Russia rose from US\$2.7 billion to 75 billion between 2000 and 2008. The country's investments abroad grew fast as well. From 2000 to 2006, Russian companies invested US\$03 billion to 19 billion abroad.¹⁶ Between 2000 and 2008, Russia's annual growth rate was 7.3 per cent driven by growth in international price in commodities, especially energy.¹⁷ In February 2000, Putin said he would aim to "build a unified national program to guide development and strengthening of the executive branch of government so as to win the fight against crime and terrorism..... benefits of democracy, a law-based state, and personal and political freedom have to be valued.....the public looks forward to the restoration of the guiding and regulating role of the state to a degree which is necessary."¹⁸ The central authority was strengthened with policies that reduced the power of Russia's federal subjects.¹⁹

The State Programme of Armaments (GPV)-2010,²⁰ formulated in 2002, emphasised more spending on research, development and investment in procurement. The GPV 2007-2015 stressed that by 2025, Russian forces would be fully equipped with modern weaponry, bolstering Russian nuclear deterrence, proposed inclusion of more modern land-based and submarine launched Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), new strategic bombers and nuclear submarines armed with such missiles. The *Defence White Paper-2003* attached more importance on asymmetric, high-tech warfare.²¹ In February 2006, Putin founded the United Aircraft Corporation (UAC) with six major manufacturers—Sukhoi, Mikoyan, Ilyushin, Irkut, Tupolev and Yakovlev.

Dmitry Medvedev contributed significantly to salvage the post-USSR Russia. The "Medvedev Modernisation Programme" was intended towards promoting socioeconomic, technological development, and efficient use of energy resources in Russia. To deal with the Russian economic crisis of 2008, he provided billions of rubles to save the financial system.²² In 2011, Medvedev initiated Russian police reform.²³ Russian position improved in the Corruption Perception Index; from 146 in 2009, it improved to 143 in 2011 and 133

¹⁶ Nigel-Gould Davies, *Russia's Sovereign Globalization: Rise, Fall and Future*, London, UK: Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, January 2016, p. 7.

¹⁷ Iikka Korhonen and Alexander N. Lyakin, "Problems and Prospects of Russia's Economic Growth", *St. Petersburg State University Journal of Economic Studies*, 2017, Vol. 33, No. 1, pp. 36-50.

¹⁸ Karen Dawisha, *Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?*, New York City, New York, USA: Simon & Schuster, 2014, p. 570.

¹⁹ William Thompson, "Putin and the Oligarchs: A Two-sided Commitment Problem", in Alex Pravda (ed.), *Leading Russia: Putin in Perspective: Essays in Honour of Archie Brown*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 179.

²⁰ *Gosudarstvennaia Programma Vooruzheniia (GPV)*.

²¹ Marcel de Haas, *Russia's Military Reforms: Victory after Twenty Years of Failure*, Clingendael Paper No. 5, Clingendael, Netherlands Institute of International Relations, The Hague, Netherlands, November 2011, pp. 13-17.

²² Tony Halpin, "Russia Floods Markets with Cash in Shutdown", *The Times*, 18 September 2008.

²³ Olga Semukhina, "From Militia to Police: The Path of Russian Law Enforcement Reforms", *Russian Analytical Digest*, No. 151, 30 June 2014, p. 2.

in 2012.²⁴ Medvedev amended civil service laws requiring civil servants to report their income and assets.²⁵ State-owned assets considered redundant or unprofitable were ordered to be sold or privatised and the profit was decided to be used in economic modernisation. Upgrading of the country's armed forces, including the structure and weapons systems, was stepped up. In May 2010, Medvedev declared that under the upcoming GPV 2011-2020, Russia would allocate US\$ 425 billion on armament. He reiterated the importance of nuclear weapons and unified air and space defence system.²⁶

The Russo-Georgian War during Medvedev's presidency showed Russia's willingness to exert politico-military capability beyond its own territory. Russia overtly supported Abkhazian and South Ossetian secession movements, recognised their independence, invaded, fought and defeated Georgia. NATO suspended military cooperation with Russia, but members with closer ties to Russia pursued gradual improvement of relations. The US also sought similar improvement. In April 2009, both countries at the G20 (Group of Twenty) summit in London released a joint statement for a new beginning in their mutual ties. Medvedev signed the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with the US for further reduction and limitation of strategic offensive weapons. It will remain in effect up to 2021. He also advocated greater Russian cooperation with the BRICS group.²⁷ Russia became a member of World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2012 after almost two decades of negotiation.²⁸

These reforms undertaken by Putin and Medvedev rescued Russia extensively from the muddle it was in after the fall of the USSR. Putin began the initial recovery, including political stabilisation, economic strengthening and military's overhauling. He has been notably successful in these initiatives. Winning the Chechen War stabilised Russia's interior and generated vital support from the West. Putin assured Russian oligarchs that he would not interfere in their business or go for more nationalisation, but they should stay out of politics. His government has been free from billionaires' intervention and the state gained control over strategic industries like defence and energy resources.²⁹ National Priority Projects concerning healthcare, housing, agriculture and education were undertaken in September 2005. The government engaged efforts on increasing care for children and mothers, raising life expectancy and introduced programmes to address lethal diseases.³⁰ Agricultural productions

²⁴ "Corruption Index 2012 from Transparency International: Find out how Countries Compare", *The Guardian*, 05 December 2012.

²⁵ Gordon M. Hahn, "Medvedev, Putin, and Perestroika 2.0", *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 2010, p. 238.

²⁶ Marcel de Haas, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-23.

²⁷ Oxfam, *BRICS and the Challenges in Fighting Inequality*, Rio De Janeiro-RJ, Brazil: Oxfam, 2014, p. 8.

²⁸ Larry Elliott, "Russia's Entry to WTO Ends 19 Years of Negotiations", *The Guardian*, 22 August 2012.

²⁹ Rawi Abdelal, "Promise and Peril of Russia's Resurgent State", *Harvard Business Review*, January-February 2010, p. 127.

³⁰ Linda Cook, "Constraints on Universal Healthcare in the Russian Federation", United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), Working Paper 2015-5, February 2015, Geneva, Switzerland, p. 9.

rose from US\$23.09 billion to 43.27 billion in 2010, reaching 84.23 billion by 2015.³¹ Military reforms of 2008 enacted steady reduction of conscripts while increasing fighting capacities and extensive modernisation.

A country's stable and improved domestic conditions help advance its foreign policy goals and apply power and influence beyond its borders. In that respect, Putin and Medvedev can be considered successful. Putin has served three times as president (including from 2012 to present) and two times as premier, while Medvedev served as president and premier one time for both posts. Through their leadership, they stabilised Russia's domestic atmosphere and the country's capacity to challenge Western preponderance, visibly with more force. This will be discussed in detail in chapters ahead.

2.3 *Recovering Russia's Global Stature*

Russia witnessed steady and praiseworthy restitution of its earlier high-profile in world affairs. After the 9/11 attacks, Russia expressed deep sympathy to the US and supported the US' war on terrorism. The NATO-Russia Council was established in 2002. Russia allowed its own airspace for use by the US forces and logistics supply for the US war in Afghanistan.³² It stubbornly opposed the second Iraq War (2003); when several NATO countries and Japan authorised use of force in Iraq, Russia together with Canada, France and Germany, advocated for diplomacy. Putin called the US invasion of Iraq as a total failure and regretted that Russia's predictions had come true after the war continued violently.³³ He vehemently opposed (maintains that stance till date) recognition of Kosovo and termed the declaration of Kosovo's independence as a terrible precedent, which would collapse total international relations.³⁴ Deputy Premier Medvedev also voiced support for Serbia. Putin sent humanitarian aid for Serb enclaves in Kosovo.³⁵ In early 2013, Russia provided Serbia with US\$800 million in loan for modernising railways and additional US\$500 million for economic development. They have significant mutual cooperation in military, economic and energy sectors.³⁶

Russia concluded several cooperation agreements with India and assured full support for the "Make in India" project. Already, India is producing Sukhoi and Mikoyan fighters under Russian license. Putin said his country would like to join the

³¹ "Main Indicators: Agricultural by Types of Enterprises", Russian Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat), available at http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/en/figures/agriculture/, accessed on 20 May 2016.

³² Peter Baker, "Russia to Open Airspace to U.S. for Afghan War", *The New York Times*, 03 July 2009.

³³ Adam Taylor, "Russia on Iraq: 'We Told You So'", *The Washington Post*, 12 June 2014.

³⁴ "Putin Calls Kosovo Independence 'Terrible Precedent'", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 February 2008.

³⁵ Dmitry Solovyov, "Russia's Putin Orders Aid for Kosovo Serb Enclaves", *Reuters*, 24 March 2008, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL24554167>, accessed on 25 May 2016.

³⁶ Jelena Milić, "The Russification of Serbia", *New Eastern Europe*, 16 October 2014.

Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor Infrastructure Project and build a smart city in India with Russian technology.³⁷ Russia is also a part of the (planned) North-South Transport Corridor linking Russia, Europe, India, Iran and Central Asia, which will help faster movement of goods, vehicles and people among these regions. Russia and India remain firmly supportive of each other to fight terrorism.

Russia-Iran ties also grew. Putin attended the Second Caspian Summit at Tehran in October 2007 where he said all Caspian states had the right to develop peaceful nuclear energy. Russia helped Iran build the Bushehr nuclear power plant. It voted against Iran in UNSC resolutions in 2006, 2007 and 2008, but blocked additional punitive step against Iran in September 2008. Russia was a member in the Iran nuclear deal framework; it openly supports Iran's right to peaceful use of nuclear energy, supplied logistics for Bushehr plant, and repeatedly warned the US and Israel against attacking Iran which could bring in dire consequences.³⁸

Massive reserves of energy resources help Russia secure its magnitude in the global arena. Many European countries heavily rely on Russian energy supplies. The country uses its energy resources as an effectual nonmilitary instrument in foreign policy,³⁹ e.g., the Lukoil interrupted oil supply to Mazeikiiai refinery in Lithuania when a conflict of interest in that refinery erupted between the US and Russia. During the emergence of the Ukraine crisis of 2014, Russia cut off gas supply to Ukraine when its debt to Gazprom became huge and the country made a deal with Eurostream of Slovakia. It is aware of the power of its energy resources, makes good use of these resources when necessary and participates in various systems focusing on them.

Russia is making its presence visible in different regional and global fora. The CIS was formed to continue relations among post-Soviet states with mechanisms for political, economic and military cooperation, notably the CSTO and CIS Free Trade Area. However, CIS is seen as Russia's sphere of influence.⁴⁰ EAEU holds dialogues with many countries and regional groups, e.g., Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN),⁴¹ for expanding economic relations. It contains Eurasian Customs Union (EACU) and the Eurasian Economic Space, a single market. Russia and Kazakhstan created the EDB; other members are Armenia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Russia is also interested in furthering continental and transcontinental connectivity. In March 2015, head of Russian state railways, said about the Trans-Eurasian Belt

³⁷ "Narendra Modi-Vladimir Putin Meet: India, Russia to Explore Oil and Gas; Aim for \$30 bn Trade", *The Financial Express*, 12 December 2014.

³⁸ "Russia Warns Israel, U.S. Striking Iran Would Be 'Literally Disastrous'", *Haaretz*, 06 September 2012.

³⁹ John Lough, *Russia's Energy Diplomacy*, London, UK: Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, May 2011, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Paul Kubicek, "The Commonwealth of Independent States: An Example of Failed Regionalism?", *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2009, p. 242.

⁴¹ Ian Storey and Anton Tsvetov, "ASEAN and Russia Look to Achieve their Full Potential", *The Straits Times*, 02 June, 2016.

Development (TERP), a concept for high speed railway and motorway built from East Europe, across Siberia and over Bering Strait to Alaska.⁴²

Once a major donor, Russian contributions drastically dried up during the last years of the USSR. Now, the country is increasing its assistance; Russia spent US\$472.32 million on foreign aid in 2010,⁴³ 876 million in 2014 and 1.2 billion in 2015.⁴⁴ It provided humanitarian aid during the Indian Ocean Tsunami, Tajikistan food crisis, Pakistan floods, Haiti earthquake, Syrian civil unrest, fighting ebola etc. Largest recipients of Russian humanitarian aid are Syria, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan followed by Palestine, North Korea and African nations.⁴⁵

3. How Influential has Russia been as a Global Player in Recent Times?

Russia has for long been a vital player in international affairs. With the disappearance of the USSR, its demonstration of power shrank for some years but also recovered and began to reassert itself after Putin came into power.

The first case of Russia's return as an influential global player can be started with its articulation of camaraderie with the US and other Western nations in the US-led global war on terror. Russia has suffered much from separatism and terrorism, e.g., Moscow theatre hostage crisis (2002), Beslan school siege (2004), and bombings in Moscow Metro (2010), Domodedovo Airport (2011) and Volgograd (2013) garnered huge sympathy and support for Russia from Western and other nations. Meanwhile, Russia keeps efforts up and tries to brighten its image as a potent associate against global terrorism.

Russia is staunchly supportive of Serbia and, likewise, opposes Kosovo's independence. During the Kosovo War, Russia could not apply large scale military might. But it has not recognised Kosovo and used the International Court of Justice (ICJ) verdict delivered concerning Kosovo's declaration of independence, which said international law was not violated,⁴⁶ for recognising Crimean referendum and independence from Ukraine and incorporation into Russia.⁴⁷

⁴² Jon Stone, "Russia Unveils Plans for High Speed Railway and Superhighway to Connect Europe and America", *The Independent*, 25 March 2015.

⁴³ Claire Provost, "The Rebirth of Russian Foreign Aid", *The Guardian*, 25 May 2011.

⁴⁴ "The Russian Federation's Official Development Assistance (ODA)", Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), available at <http://www.oecd.org/russia/russias-official-development-assistance.htm>, accessed on 25 May 2016.

⁴⁵ Martin Russell, "At a Glance: Russia's Humanitarian Aid Policy", Briefing, European Parliamentary Research Service, May 2016, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁶ Chatham House, *Kosovo: The ICJ Opinion – What Next*, London, UK: Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2010, p. 5.

⁴⁷ Rene Värk, "The Advisory Opinion on Kosovo's Declaration of Independence: Hopes, Disappointments and Its Relevance to Crimea", *XXXIV Polish Yearbook of International Law 2014*, Warsaw, Poland: Polish Academy of

Backing countries that have hostility with the West is another example of Russia exercising power. Venezuela has received Russian assistance for long time. After Chavez, Maduro assumed power and Russian support continues. Amid Venezuela's internal unrest and ongoing rift with the US, the Rosneft delivered US\$ 01 billion to Venezuela's national oil firm in exchange for a promise of oil shipments later.⁴⁸ Russia, along with Bolivia, rejected the military threat uttered by the current US presidency. US-Cuba enmity has long history. In 2017, there had been possibility of a contract between Russia and Cuba under which Cuba would receive petroleum from Russia, as Venezuela itself is in deeply insecure position.⁴⁹ Since 2008, Russia has been increasing military relations with Nicaragua. When US and European aid schemes were withdrawn from that country, Russian support became even more important. Noticeably, Russia's relations are growing with countries near US borders that do not have cordial bilateral relations with the US.

Russia was one of the six parties involved in the Iran nuclear deal framework. Later, when Israel increased war of words against Iran with accusation of violating the deal and urged to keep all options open against Iran, Russia, during Sergey Lavrov's visit to Iran, said about plans for selling S-400 missiles to that country.⁵⁰ It warned Israel and the US to refrain from attacking Iran. Since the deal, Russian companies also increased their involvement in Iranian economy.⁵¹ President Obama hailed Russia's role in the nuclear deal. The US and Russia also agreed to work jointly on making sure the agreement would be upheld.⁵²

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad remains in power due to Russian assistance. Since 2011 to date, Russia vetoed every resolution brought against Syria at the UNSC. After Syria's request for assistance against rebels, Russia launched military intervention in that country in September 2015. Russia, Iran, Iraq and Syria formed a coalition in September 2015 for sharing intelligence among opponents of the Islamic State (ISIL). Russian airstrikes against ISIL in Syria have received mixed reactions. Russia provides Syria with humanitarian aid and has been working with different parties for establishing peace in the country.

Pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovich won the controversial October 2004 presidential election in Ukraine. But his government fell after the Orange

Sciences Institute of Law Studies and the Committee on Legal Sciences, 2015, p. 1.

⁴⁸ Marianna Parraga and Alexandra Ulmer, "Russia's Biggest Company has been Secretly Helping Maduro Stay Afloat in Venezuela", *Business Insider*, 11 August 2017.

⁴⁹ Haley Zaremba, "Venezuela's Oil Industry is Collapsing and Cuba is Scrambling", *Business Insider*, 15 June 2017.

⁵⁰ Xenia Wickett and Jacob Parakilas, *Transatlantic Rifts: Stress-testing the Iran Deal*, London, UK: Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, May 2016, p. 6.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 12.

⁵² "US President Thanks Putin for Russia's Role in Iran Nuclear Deal", *The Moscow Times*, 16 July 2015.

Revolution that began in late November 2004. Russia expressed bitter reaction about the revolution and ouster of Yanukovich. Russian role in the secession and annexation of Crimea has deeply strained relations with the West. It did not want Ukraine to join the EU.⁵³ Crimea was annexed into Russia and a number of conflicts erupted in eastern and southern Ukraine. The self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk republics are trying to become sovereign states, which in turn, are protracting a vicious war in Donbass since 2014. Pro-Russian protests in these regions aim at union with Russia, making Ukraine a federal country and Russian as a second official language. This war has been going on with explicit Russian assistance.

NATO expansion remains a big headache for Russia. Despite various cooperation programmes, mistrust exists between the two sides, already worsened with the Russo-Georgian War and Russian intervention in Ukraine. Confrontations are rising albeit not culminating into open conflicts. Russia fervently opposes the US missile shield in Poland, says the system endangers its security and is taking measures to counter threats emanating from it.⁵⁴ Russia's apprehensions are evident in its hard-line attitude towards NATO members and those considering full-fledged membership. Denmark was threatened with use of nuclear weapons if it would join NATO defence shield.⁵⁵ Georgia could not become a NATO member as NATO tried to avoid more clash with Russia; Russia is developing its weaponry to keep pace with its Western counterparts. The United Aircraft Corporation (UAC) is tasked with building new, more powerful military aircrafts, including those fitted with stealth technology and development of 6th generation fighters. Current aircrafts are undergoing heavy upgrade and older ones being replaced.

Russia deftly uses energy resources for bargaining with the EU. They sanctioned Russia after the Ukraine crisis but even then, Russia was and remains a vital energy supplier to the EU. Energy trade remains the key economic driver in the EU-Russia relations. During the Ukraine crisis, Russia threatened to stop gas supplies to Kiev over Ukraine's unpaid debts to Gazprom. Lord Howell, former energy secretary of Britain, said in 2014 that as Europe relied on Russian gas, in some cases 100 per cent, sudden interruption in supply would mean severe difficulties.⁵⁶

Russian exercises near borders with European members of NATO, particularly former Soviet states, raise their fears of a supposed invasion, prompting NATO's

⁵³ Richard Balmforth, "Kiev Protesters Gather, EU Dangles Aid Promise", *Reuters*, 12 December 2013, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/12/12/us-ukraine-idUSBRE9BA04420131212>, accessed on 24 May 2016.

⁵⁴ Andrew E. Kramer, "Russia Calls New U.S. Missile Defense System a 'Direct Threat'", *The New York Times*, 09 May 2016.

⁵⁵ Gudrun Persson, "Russian Strategic Deterrence – Beyond the Brinkmanship", RUF5 Briefing No. 29, Swedish Defence Research Agency, Stockholm, Sweden, September 2015, p. 1.

⁵⁶ Damien McElroy, "Putin Mocks the West and Threatens to Turn off Gas Supplies", *The Telegraph*, 07 March 2014.

preparation for such possibilities. They repeatedly express anxiety and join NATO drills. Russia accuses NATO of violating agreement that bars military presence on its eastern borders.⁵⁷

Russia's archrival the US also experienced growing Russian influence. A good example is the allegation of Russian interference in the US presidential election 2016. It is alleged that Putin preferred Donald Trump instead of Hillary Clinton.⁵⁸ Allegations range from Democratic Party website hacks to President Trump's, son's and son-in-law's connections with Russia, Trump election campaign's meeting with some Russian representatives in June 2016, General Michael Flynn's dismissal over Russian links,⁵⁹ Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's ties to Russia and Putin,⁶⁰ Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) director James Comey's sacking, Trump and Putin praising each other, etc. The allegations, scandals and ensuing probes have been pretty much disturbing for the US, as Russian linkage in determining election of the US president is unthinkable.

Another manifestation is Russia's improving relations with a few allies of the West. Russo-Turkish relations are growing that were hit hard after Turkey shot down a Russian warplane in November 2015. Russia imposed a series of economic sanctions on Turkey. Relations normalised after President Erdogan in June 2016 regretted the shoot-down. Russia lifted sanctions and normalised ties. Turkey thanked Russia for the support extended during the July 2016 military coup. They decided to deepen trade ties and set up a joint investment fund for projects.⁶¹ Russia is also warming up to Pakistan. Since the 9/11 attacks, US war on terror and Osama bin Laden's death inside Pakistan, the country's relations with the West have plummeted sharply. By contrast, India has moved closer to the West. In recent times, there has been noticeable progress in Pak-Russian ties. Pakistan expressed willingness to buy *Su-35* fighters and *Mil Mi-35* attack helicopters from Russia. In August 2015, they signed a defence deal. In September 2016, their joint military exercise worried India. Russia assured India not to worry, but it also supported Pakistan's full-fledged membership in SCO where Pakistan is now a member.

Russia nowadays expresses its positions and opinions, and performs functions of a global power more confidently. It retained considerable amounts of USSR-era arsenal (all types) as well as is strengthening and modernising its military might. Vast reserves of energy resources make Russia a leading global exporter of those resources

⁵⁷ Tom Batchelor, "Russia Could Invade Europe 'in Hours' Baltic States Issue Shock Warning over Putin's Plans", *The Express*, 14 June 2016.

⁵⁸ Mikhail Zygar, "Why Putin Prefers Trump", *Politico*, 27 July 2016.

⁵⁹ Michael Crowley, "All of Trump's Russia Ties, in 7 Charts", *Politico*, 17 April 2017.

⁶⁰ Bradley Olson, "Rex Tillerson, a Candidate for Secretary of State, Has Ties to Vladimir Putin", *The Wall Street Journal*, 06 December 2016.

⁶¹ "Turkey, Russia to Deepen Trade Ties, Set up Joint Investment Fund for Projects in Two Countries", *The Daily Sabah*, 06 December 2016.

and give political power with their utility. Its defence, aircraft, nuclear technology and spacecraft industries are among the largest and most renowned globally. Though the ongoing Ukraine crisis, consequent sanctions and drop in global oil prices are taking huge tolls, Russia is not backing off and rather, standing up to the US and its allies through military and nonmilitary means. In battling the ISIL, Russia has resorted to independent and joint military ventures with Western nations. It is also a party to Syrian peace talks. It is aware and active about protecting its own sphere of influence. It continues expanding foreign relations with substantial focus and efforts in development of regional and global institutions like EAEU, EDB, BRICS, NDB, TERP etc. Based on these developments, Russia can be said to be playing the role of a global power well since Putin came into power.

4. Emergence of Fault-lines between Russia and the West

With growing Russian reassertion in world affairs, question can arise about the possibility of conflicts with the West. There are opinions both in support of and against any potential conflict. This chapter will try to examine both views. It starts with opinions in favour of conflict.

Russia's resurgence and exercising of power in various important issues worldwide may lead to conflict. Economic recovery has boosted Russian self-confidence and the country demonstrates its power and influence on different platforms. This economic ability has also helped modernise and increase Russian military muscle which has been flexed in the war with Georgia, intervention in Ukraine, annexation of the Crimea, use of massive force in Syrian war, frequent military drills and threatening NATO members. It continues to develop new weaponry notwithstanding under heavy sanctions.

Mounting Russia-West differences may bring conflicts. Russia often holds views contrary to the West's and acts accordingly. It continues to support and arm Assad's regime despite strong Western criticism about the use of weapons on civilians. They do not take Russian opposition to punitive measures against Iran, military agreements assistance in nuclear technology positively. The US and its allies always accuse Iran of secretly aiding Hezbollah and Hamas whom they call terrorists but Russia does not. Similarly, Western countries disapprove Russian backing of separatism in eastern and southern Ukraine and they call them insurgents.

Confrontational stances by the West and Russia alike may be another mechanism prompting conflicts. Although NATO warnings did not translate into an open clash between Russia and the West during the Russo-Georgian War, that cannot be said about the Ukraine conflict. The Georgian war resulted in NATO-Russia military ties severed and Ukraine crisis has taken relations to much lower. The US considers providing arms to Ukraine but is yet to do so openly, whereas Russia overtly aids Ukrainian separatists. European nations are increasing military capabilities to

resist Russian aggression. The US missile defence system in Poland has been highly disturbing to Russia who believes it is spawning new arms race. With such aggressive positions taken by both sides, possibility of conflicts cannot be ruled out.

Both Russia and West try persistently for building and promoting alliances. The West successfully brought many ex-Soviet states into NATO and the EU. Russia has not been able to do the exact opposite. But there is displeasure among some Western allies. Turkey, an important NATO country, has long faced harsh condemnation from the West alleging repressive governance, Turkey-Greece row over Cyprus and denial of the Armenian Genocide that make its entry into the EU much harder. It has deep grievances against the US about the controversial religious and political figure Fetullah Gulen living there and his movement. The country is now developing closer relations with Russia. It intends to buy Russian weaponry, *e.g.*, S-400 missile, after the US decision to withdraw *Patriot* missiles from southern Turkey in August 2015.⁶² Turkey also accused the West of organising the July 2016 coup⁶³ yet thanked Russia for its support. They are working jointly in Syria against the ISIL. Another Western ally, Pakistan has also witnessed nose-dive in relations with the West while India receives more preference. Pakistan is moving closer to Russia. There are other countries who do not belong to any particular grouping but face Western antagonism, *e.g.*, Iran, Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, North Korea. In some countries, there are groups facing such antagonism and may choose closer cooperation with Russia, like Hezbollah (Lebanon) or Hezbollah al-Hejaz (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain), Taliban (Afghanistan). Russia also has vulnerabilities, *i.e.*, the North Caucasus, which Western countries may use to their advantage. Just like the West brought once-USSR states into their coalition, if Russia succeeds in taking Western allies, groups or individuals into its fold dissatisfied for their treatment by Europe or the US, new conflicts can arise.

Recently, Russia and China have embarked upon various new enterprises for cooperation, as evident in the formation of SCO, BRICS, NDB, EAEU, New Silk Route, TERP to expand relations on multidimensional basis. NDB was inaugurated with the aim of introducing a new global financial architecture, parallel to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. Russia and China also display political and military power, *e.g.*, Russia in Europe and China in the East and South China seas, extending support to Iran and easing tensions on the Korean Peninsula, to name a few. In many cases, they take joint and similar stances in facing the West, notably the US. Reminiscent of the Sino-Soviet platform during the Cold War, the present day extensive Sino-Russian cooperation can create new conflicts owing to their rivalry with the West and its allies.

⁶² Eric Schmitt, "After Delicate Negotiations, U.S. Says It Will Pull Patriot Missiles from Turkey", *The New York Times*, 16 August 2015.

⁶³ "Erdogan Accuses West of 'Writing the Script' for Turkey Coup", *The Telegraph*, 02 August 2016.

There are also reasons against Russia-West conflict with Russian resurgence. To start with such reasons, the absence of Cold War era-like-surroundings can be an important aspect. Communism has lost its appeal worldwide. The Warsaw Pact is no more and any likelihood of its reappearance is not in sight. Russia and former communist nations are fully market economy today. Moreover, Russia will not be able to acquire huge manpower unlike it could during the USSR's existence and is experiencing population decline for a long time. Amid bellicose polemics, Russia and the West know each other's strength and weaknesses well and neither side wants total mutual destruction. Such pressure will avert new conflicts of Cold War nature.

Next are economic cooperation and interdependence. The world is profoundly globalised now. Russia is also a part of it, well integrated with the global economy unlike its managed isolation during the bipolar days. Economic progress helped the country's resurgence. In the midst of Russia-West confrontations on Ukraine, NATO expansion and Russia's aggressive responses, economic relations were not cut off. The energy weapon used conveniently against European countries continues to be supplied. But Russia lacks a diverse export base, remaining mainly dependent on export of energy resources and military equipment. Sanctions after the Ukraine crisis decreased Russian economic progress and falling oil prices pushed the economy into recession.⁶⁴ In such conditions, Russia may not continue its forceful postures for long, as economic weakness will also harm military capabilities. Equally, the West may not engage in a new conflict either after two debilitating, costly wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and their own economic and security vulnerabilities, especially the ISIL, other Muslim militants, a persistent threat they regularly express common standpoint about and work on to counter.

Capability of CIS, EAEU, NDB, BRICS, CSTO, in comparison to established Western institutions like the EU, NATO, IMF, World Bank, is yet to prove in reality. In CIS, EAEU and CSTO, Russia is the most powerful member; it has a range of disagreements with Western countries, but other members do not. The same applies to BRICS and NDB where Brazil and India have little or no problem with the West. While China has problems with the West and its allies, and India, it does not go for an open combat and keeps limited to 'show of force' or 'warlike rhetoric'. It focuses more on economic development and connectivity. Thus, despite China-Russia multifaceted relations and common positions while facing up the West, new conflicts seem implausible. World affairs are subject to constant changes. Russia receiving Western assistance and Western incorporation of former USSR states were unthinkable before the USSR's dissolution just like

⁶⁴ Ara Stepanyan, Agustin Roitman, Gohar Minasyan, Dragana Ostojic and Natan Epstein, *The Spillover Effects of Russia's Economic Slowdown on Neighboring Countries*, Departmental Paper, Washington D. C., USA International Monetary Fund (IMF), 2015, p. 5.

Pakistan's warmer relations with Russia and India moving closer to the West. It also applies to Russia and the West. The intervention in Ukraine brought harsh sanctions on Russia but European countries, such as Hungary,⁶⁵ Bulgaria,⁶⁶ and France, themselves are divided on these sanctions.⁶⁷ It has to be remembered that during the Cold War, Sino-Soviet split was a major breakthrough for the West in weakening the socialist bloc. Even if Russia and the West are trying to expand and maintain their respective spheres of influence, members' loyalty is not guaranteed. Thus, new conflicts will not be viable for either side.

Another argument against a new conflict is the polarisation of the world. The previous Cold War existed in a bipolar setting. But in today's world, there are several poles. For example, Venezuela in South America and Cuba in the Caribbean remain sturdily defiant of the US. In the Middle East, Iran aided by Russia and China, also tries to confront the US and its allies in bold manner. Rifts are slowly developing in Pakistan and Turkey's relations with Western countries. Non-state actors like separatist/insurgent/terrorist groups are rarely limited to any single country or region. For example, Muslim militants like the Taliban are not only operating in Pakistan and Afghanistan, but there are several such groups in Central Asia, China, Middle East and Africa. Even if new conflicts arise, who will fight whom or what methods should be used, is not clear. Non-state groups' random use of violence draws collective response even by disagreeing parties, like the war on ISIL, and thus, chances of new conflicts will potentially fade away.

5. Concluding Remarks

Since Putin came into power, Russia underwent noteworthy recovery in economy, politics and military, which after the fall of the USSR was in shambles. However, valuable contributions by Putin and Medvedev in domestic and foreign policies of Russia have provided the country with stature of an entity to be respected. Such recovery has led to its growing importance and in turn, powerful reassertion in world affairs. Unlike the Cold War era, Russia does not rely on military might only but also uses nonmilitary means frequently in securing its position, as seen in the establishment of regional organisations like EAEU, BRICS, CIS etc. As a permanent UNSC member, it also uses the veto power to thwart any initiative that may harm its interests which often go against the West.

⁶⁵ Gergely Szakacs, "Europe 'Shot Itself in Foot' with Russia Sanctions: Hungary PM", *Reuters*, 15 August 2014, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-sanctions-hungary-idUSKBN0GF0ES20140815>, accessed on 30 May 2016.

⁶⁶ Adrian Croft, "Bulgaria Says It is Suffering from EU Sanctions on Russia", *The Daily Mail*, 04 December 2014.

⁶⁷ "French Lawmakers Vote for Lifting EU Sanctions against Russia", *Deutsche Welle*, 28 April 2016, available at <http://www.dw.com/en/french-lawmakers-vote-for-lifting-eu-sanctions-against-russia/a-19223170>, accessed on 30 May 2016.

After the USSR's demise, Russia-West relations were hoped to improve as there was growing cooperation between the two. Russia-NATO military cooperation was undertaken. Russia took up diverse reform endeavours. The 9/11 attacks brought Russia and West closer as evident in Russian statement of solidarity with the US. Under Medvedev, there were greater hopes. But the Russo-Georgian War during his presidency marked the beginning of cracks. NATO-Russia military ties were suspended. Russian intervention in Ukraine, annexation of Crimea, openly backing separatists in eastern and southern Ukraine, resulted in Western sanctions on Russia and took their bilateral relations to a nadir.

Russia these days exhibits its politico-military clout in stern defiance of the West. Under Putin and Medvedev, Russia's growing stature allows it to do so; its strong opposition of the Iraq War (2003) and Kosovo's declaration of independence, while standing firmly by and assisting Serbia, playing vital role in Iran nuclear deal, vehemently criticising NATO expansion and the US missile defence systems in Poland, frequently holding military drills, threatening European and possible members of NATO, developing new weaponry, supporting countries that have hostility with the West, using enormous military might against ISIL in Syria and strongly supporting the Assad government are some useful instances. Another remarkable case of Russia's influence is the allegation of interference in the US presidential election-2016 where the Trump administration has been severely marred with scandals implicating that country. Russia uses energy resources as a weapon when dealing with the West. Development of regional and global fora like EAEU, CIS, BRICS, TERP and NDB are other means it is using for enhancing its own position further. It is expanding relations with several Western allies, including Pakistan and Turkey. Russian noncompliance continues despite heavy sanctions. These can justify that the country has returned to the global arena quite successfully as an influential and powerful actor.

Reasons exist on both sides whether new conflicts will arise or not, with Russia's revival. Those favouring possibility of new conflicts say Russia's rise, nonstop criticism and confrontations with the West, building new regional and global political-economic structures parallel to Western established ones, trying to manipulate disgruntled Western allies, Russia-China relations and common stances in opposing the West in most cases are potent drivers. Nevertheless, reasons against new conflicts appearing contend that factors that will prevent new conflicts include absence of ideological battleground and military alliances (Warsaw Pact vs. NATO), globalisation promoting growing economic dependence and interactions, Russia and the West's knowledge of mutual strengths and weaknesses, nations focusing more on economic progress rather than all-out military battles, prospects of nonwestern fora, uncertainty if China or Russia

will really opt for open combats with the West or their allies, increasing role of non-state actors, threats of global terrorism and ensuing cooperation among differing parties.

Russia has always been an important player in global affairs. The country lost that status after the fall of the USSR, but has recovered under Putin and Medvedev; it now states own standpoints and acts according to its choices with explicit display of strength challenging the West. Nonetheless, strict sanctions, volatility or continuous drops in energy prices and global economic slump are adding to the country's economic troubles. Economic decline was a crucial factor behind the USSR's fall and similarly, economic growth under Putin and Medvedev administrations aided Russia's revival. The West is also facing economic slump from which many are yet to recover. In a constantly changing world, even if a new war starts in deed, neither Russia nor the West will be able to bear that burden.

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