

PRATIYOGITA DARPAN

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Political Article

The Resurgence of Russia

—S. Ganesa Subramanian

Russia is no longer on its knees : It is developing a new identity. Russia's resurgence has been underway since 2004 when Vladimir Putin, through his tough domestic policy measures, put an end to several ambiguities and misgivings about Russia's ability to stage a comeback as a power of consequence. Putin's military successes in Chechnya provided Russia the latitude and sense of self confidence for restoring the country's lost strength and international prestige.

Hence, under Putin, Russia has finally emerged as a more or less well-to-do nation, but it wants to have the feeling that now it will be regarded by the other nations differently, with more respect. Towards this Russia has redefined its foreign policy and its governing principles.

Russia, today, seeks to maintain 'privileged interests' in its spheres of influence, including those bordering the country. Russia strongly puts forth that the world should be multipolar, unipolarity is unacceptable, and domination is impermissible. Russian Premier has said "We cannot accept a world order in which all decisions are taken by one country, even such a serious and authoritative country as the United States of America. This kind of world is unstable and fraught with conflict."

This means that Russia will not accept the primacy of the United States (or a combination of the US and its allies) in determining world policy. It will require that its own interests are taken into account.

Russia asserts that its unquestionable priority is to protect the life and dignity of its citizens, 'wherever they are'. Russia has asserted that it will also proceed from this in pursuing its foreign policy and to protect the interest of its business community abroad. Russia has made it clear to everyone that "if someone makes aggressive forays, he will get a response."

This was the basis on which Russia went to war in South Ossetia. More than half of South Ossetia's 70,000 citizens are said to have taken up Moscow's offer of Russian citizenship. Russia also had peacekeepers based in South Ossetia. Some of them were killed in the Georgian attack on August 7, 2008.

Following Georgia's military action, Russia recognized the independence of both South Ossetia and Abkhazia on August 26. Russia has also signed friendship treaties with the breakaway regions, formalizing diplomatic ties and pledging military assistance. However the real reason for the military action is considered to be Georgia's plans to enter the NATO.

The action contains within it the potential for future interventions—over Crimea, which is populated by a majority Russian-background population yet owned by Ukraine only since 1954. If Ukraine looked set to join NATO, Russia would claim the protection of its 'citizens' there also.

Separatist fighters in Abkhazia are also reported to be aided by Russian regular troops and volunteers from across the North Caucasus, since September 1993, when they captured the capital, Sukhumi.

Russian action on Georgia also has a regional dimension of Oil politics. The Western-sponsored Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline has been pumping Caspian oil from Azerbaijan through Georgia to Turkey's Mediterranean coast. The pipeline can deliver up to 1.2 million barrels per day (b/d) of oil to Western markets.

The BTC pipeline also supports Georgia's independence from Russian influence. Georgia considers the pipeline through its territory as a guarantee for the country's future economic and political security and stability. But Russia claims that the pipeline will weaken the Russian influence in the Caucasus. The South Caucasus, previously seen as Russia's

backyard, is now a region of great strategic significance.

The U.S. and other Western nations have become much more involved in the affairs of the three nations through which oil will flow. The countries have been trying to use the involvement as a counterbalance to Russian and Iranian economic and military dominance in the region. Russia views the NATO expansion to include Georgia and Ukraine as the plan of the United States and other Western countries to station soldiers in the Caucasus on the pretext of instability in regions through which the pipeline passes.

Russia has made it expressly clear that "just like other countries in the world, it also has regions where it has its privileged interests." These 'priority regions' are those that border on Russia. Thus, Russia reserves to itself the right to intervene anywhere in the world where it considers its interest is threatened. Russia has made its concerns known repeatedly about NATO expansion to its neighbours. Russia had called Georgia and Ukraine 'red lines'.

U.S. support for the independence of Kosovo has been another issue of contention. Russia argues that if the West can redraw European boundaries against the wishes of Russia and its ally Serbia, then it can redraw boundaries, too. Russia also considers US attempt to set up anti-missile defenses in its backyard as 'unduly provocative' and takes it as the pretext to assert itself. Thus, it asserts that it cannot let its 'Sphere of influence' go.

The Middle East region as a 'strategic cockpit' for power-play between the United States and formerly the Soviet Union and now a resurgent Russia needs no introduction. During the Cold War the power-blocs confrontation in Europe was replicated in the Middle East between the United States and Western supported oil-rich Arab monarchical kingdoms and the