

Russia-China Relations in the Post-Crisis International Order. By Marcin Kaczmarek. London and New York: Routledge, 2015. xvi, 176 pp. Notes. Index. Illustrations. Plates. Figures. Table. \$160.00, hard bound.

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In this slim volume, Marcin Kaczmarek of the University of Warsaw tackles the puzzle of why a declining Russia has accommodated China's rise, rather than seeking to balance a potential challenger as realist theory would predict, and why an increasingly powerful China has exercised restraint in its relations with Russia. This behavior is especially curious given Moscow's highly confrontational policy toward the United States, and China's more aggressive posture toward the U.S. and its neighbors in the Asia-Pacific.

Kaczmarek explores the importance of domestic factors in the Russian-Chinese relationship in Chapter 2. Central to Russian identity is its great power status globally, and its role as a regional hegemon in the post-Soviet space. Putin and his close advisors see China as posing no threat to Russia's ambitions, but rather as supportive of two key dimensions of Russian identity—its deserved place as a great power in international politics, and its dominance of the post-Soviet space. Beijing approves of Putin's authoritarian governance, and generally takes Moscow's side in its confrontations with the west.

Using a social-constructivist framework, Kaczmarek posits Sino-Russian relations as neither a strategic partnership nor an axis of convenience, but rather a peaceful power transition process. Geopolitical interests and material capabilities are important but insufficient to explain the Sino-Russian rapprochement, he suggests. Realist logic predicts conflict between rising and declining powers, but realism's mechanistic model fails to take into account agency. The "other" may be constructed as an existential threat, or as a peaceful partner. Kaczmarek references the late nineteenth/early twentieth century rise of the United States and the decline of Britain, and the absence of conflict between the two, as a precedent for peaceful power transition. He argues that the global economic crisis of 2008 "contributed to the transformation of the relationship and fostered a peaceful power transition between Russia and China" (3), bilaterally, regionally, and globally.

Few analysts see Russia and China following this model. The conventional wisdom assesses their "strategic partnership" to be a convenient, albeit temporary, alliance based on mutual hostility toward American global dominance. In Kaczmarek's alternative interpretation, the United States constitutes an important dimension of the Sino-Russian relationship, but the two countries have formed a mature relationship based on more than shared opposition to American unilateralism. They have created, in effect, a tacit division of labor. In Central Asia, for example, Moscow has acknowledged China's need for natural resources and its growing economic presence, while Beijing has deferred to Russia on regional security issues. Russia needs Chinese investment to develop the Russian energy sector and its isolated Far Eastern region, while China values Russian hydrocarbons and advanced weapons.

In East Asia, the author describes Russian-Chinese ties as "neither cooperation nor competition" (108); that is, Russia is neither hedging nor balancing against China. However, recent developments indicate a more decisive shift by Moscow in favor of Beijing. Russia supported China in its dispute with the Philippines over the South China islands (contravening the Permanent Court of Arbitration's ruling against Beijing), and in late 2016 Russian naval forces conducted joint exercises with the Chinese just off the Paracels. Russian backing for China's assertive posture in the Asia-Pacific reinforces Kaczmarek's narrative of a gradual accommodation to Chinese preeminence.

I would take issue with a few points. The deterioration in U.S.-Russian relations, and the improving Chinese-Russian partnership, seem less an outcome of the 2008 recession, as Kaczmarek asserts, than a gradual process of realignment over the past two decades. In his focus on China, the author slights South Korean trade and investment, which is substantial—at least in the Russian Far East. Describing China's soft power as “a success,” in the form of Confucian Institutes and the so-called Beijing Consensus (23), is a bit of a stretch. And describing the U.S. pivot (or rebalance) to the Asia-Pacific as simply a reaction to China's rejection of the western international order (127) misses the Obama administration's fatigue with intractable Middle Eastern conflicts, and the lure of the world's fastest growing markets.

That said, Kaczmarek's constructivist approach to a subject that is normally the preserve of realists provides critical insights into the process of Sino-Russian rapprochement. *Russia-China Relations in the Post-Crisis International Order* is a welcome addition to our understanding of the identities, roles, and interactions of these two major powers.

CHARLES E. ZIEGLER
University of Louisville