

World in the Putin Era: From Theory to Reality in Russian Global Strategy

Editor: Roger E. Kanet & Dina Moulioukova, *Russia and the World in the Putin Era: From Theory to Reality in Russian Global Strategy* (Routledge: 2022), 306.

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The book *World in the Putin Era: From Theory to Reality in Russian Global Strategy*, edited by Roger E. Kanet and Dina Moulioukova is an attempt to analyse a wide range of political culture and threat perceptions of Russia. It includes its response to NATO expansion, energy and information warfare strategies, and foreign policy towards the Global South, particularly the Middle East and Africa. The central point of this book is that, following a brief period in which Moscow followed a foreign policy that put collaboration with Western nations at the forefront of its relations, Russia changed its focus to regaining the status of a great power. This shift took place as a result of the United States-led West's response in the opposite direction to Russian interests after the dismemberment of the USSR. In view of increasing competition between Russia and US-led Western countries in enhancing their influence and assertiveness, the book is timely. It describes the variables that affect Russian foreign policy and shows how and why ties between Russia and the US along with the EU have deteriorated so dramatically in recent years.

The downfall of great power usually occurs when the equilibrium between military and economic power is upset. Owing to this disequilibrium, the USSR became dismembered. This left Russia striving to regain its previous position together economically and

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politically, so that the country could reestablish traditional primacy. It is pivotal for its socio-politico-economic and security policies. Quest for a stable economy, domestic compulsions, the pursuit of military modernisation, search for the role in the post-Cold War political order, security concerns, geo-economics of energy pipelines and particularly the role of leadership have been vital variables to play a crucial role for making the Russian assertiveness possible. It would work in favour of the country.

The authors of the book believe that after fading away from the status of being a superpower, Russia has been contesting re-establishment of its global outreach as a great power, especially under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin. His stringent measures regarding centralisation of power, ensuring internal security, steps against corruption and foreign policy concerns have put a major impact on the Russian new orientation. Being a visionary leader, he translated his vision in the state policy in the form of three documents: the National Security Concept, the Foreign Policy Concept, and the Military Doctrine that together depict two main hallmarks i.e. identification of vital areas for Russia and draw a framework for the country's new foreign policy guidance. His domestic strategy is to reinstate internal political stability and economic development. His foreign policy emphasises on recovering the country's Soviet period prestige and restore its position in global affairs.

The volume is divided into three parts. The first part identifies Russian foreign policy sources, tools, and threat perceptions of the Russian decision-makers. More precisely, it charts the long historical evolution of Russia's perception of itself as one of the world's major powers. It led to great power competition causing two interrelated developments such as extending the liberal international order eastward by the West, and, on the Russian side, gradual but ultimately dramatic changes in the Russian strategic thinking towards a more assertive and aggressive direction. Putin's decision to involve the

armed forces of the Russian Federation in the Syrian civil war is a case in point.

The authors identify that the Transatlantic Alliance is facing a number of difficulties, including a lack of significant funding from allies, differences in political leadership between the EU and the US, and divergent threat perceptions among allies regarding the prioritisation of security issues in the European security theatre. One of these various threat perceptions has been a fear of the Eastern European states related to Russian invasion or incursion in the region. A fractured alliance runs the risk of weakening the trans-Atlantic tie. Russia takes advantage of these fault-lines and employs hybrid warfare and cyber strategies to encourage divergent political views among the Western allies in its favour.

The second part discusses the US grand strategy including sanctions on Russia, expansion of NATO and Russian response. The essence of NATO expansion is not concentrating mainly on Russia or all of Europe. It is overtly to continue the US commitment to Europe but covertly to retain the latter's dependency regarding security matters on the former. The US has adopted economic coercion as a tool in its relations with Russia. However, the sanctions have had little impact in changing Russian behaviour towards Ukraine or stopping human rights abuses. Domestically, the West has securitised Russian foreign economic relations and led to import substitution measures to insulate the economy. Internationally, Russia is looking for alternative markets (non-Western) for its trade and investment eastward in the form of Moscow's pivot toward the Pacific region.

The third section of the book explains Russian engagement with the developing world, especially with the African continent and its expanding role in the Eastern Mediterranean, parallel with its continued participation in energy markets and exploration efforts. It identifies that Russia employs its projection of power in the Global South as part of a great power discourse, a tool to consolidate its

domestic legitimacy. This has led to Russia's involvement in number of regional crises, such as those in Syria and Libya, as well as its relations with other important nations in the area, including Turkey and Egypt. Russia's position as a regional power in the Eastern Mediterranean is far stronger today than it was even ten years ago. Russian military intervention in the Syrian conflict, its diplomacy and activism on energy markets have upgraded its role and status in the region and brought the country back to the global political stage.

The book highlights both Russian strengths and weaknesses as it interacts with its regional and international milieu. It notes that during the Trump administration, the US has become semi-isolationist in its approach (withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement and the Trans-Pacific Partnership) to the outside world, which has benefited both Russia and China. The volume estimates that the EU is attempting gradually to increase relations with the Eurasian states through political association and economic integration initiatives. On the contrary, Russia is contesting to keep the US and Europe away from its traditional area of influence and beyond.

As part of a larger strategy that underlies interactions with various countries and regions, the EU and the US have aggressively tried to sway political and economic developments in the Eurasian region. In this regard, the European Neighbourhood Policy, the Eastern Partnership, and NATO expansion are the tools to advance collaboration with the post-Soviet republics. These actions have been viewed by the Russian Federation as a threat to its objectives in regaining dominance over the traditional area of influence including Baltic, Caucasus, along with Central Asia. Ultimately, rest of the world has also been affected by the competition between Russia and the West over the future of Eurasia, particularly Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. The Ukraine war is also a case in point.

The authors believe that military modernisation, expanding diplomatic influence, economic recovery, and political stability have been instrumental in Russian assertiveness, which is facing geo-political contestation of regaining the major global power status. Russia wants to expand its politico-diplomatic influence with the aim of creating a space in which it could play a vital role to shape the geopolitics of the world. Communism, in fact, is no more but the geographical reality. It still exists and shows current Russia's competition with the West particularly in the Eurasian region. The Western powers are trying to control powerful Russia. Instead of working together to promote the future development of the Eurasian region and beyond, Russia and the West appear to be intended to continue to compete with one another in their commitment to diametrically opposed and incompatible goals. Ultimately, they have been using military, political, economic, and cyber/informational as competing tools to accomplish their goals.

The strength of this book lies in the coherent knitting of the future of Russia with descriptive historic events and ground realities. Here lies the uniqueness of the book that will be of interest to those trying to understand the geopolitics of the world during the first quarter of the twenty-first century. ■