



Novyi balans sil. Rossiya v poiskakh vneshnepoliticheskogo ravnovesiya

Dmitrii Trenin, Moscow: Alpina Books, 2021, 472pp., h/b.

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Furthermore, ‘digital coercion offers a relatively cheap alternative to other tools and allows Russia to take advantage of its highly skilled computer programmers, weak rule of law, and nondemocratic political system’ (pp. 194–95). But Putin’s Russia also exploits these peculiar features in other fields.

As George Breslauer showed us so well in his books *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders* (1982) and *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders* (2002), post-Stalin leaders have had a tremendous impact, changing policies and institutions. Yet, as do many political scientists, Frye flatly denies the importance of a leader: ‘It is more important to change the rules of the political game than to change the leader’ (p. 201). However, Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev, Mikhail Gorbachev, Boris Yel’tsin and Vladimir Putin all changed the rules of the game. Similarly, Frye speculates that ‘A post-Putin Russia may also not produce a radical shift in foreign policy’ (p. 201). That would be a first. A more pertinent observation would be that Russia’s leader has proven to be the most important factor in the direction of Russia’s foreign policy. Moreover, since Putin has deinstitutionalised Russia, a new leader may have all the greater opportunities to build new institutions.

Frye’s strawmen are those who emphasise Russia’s peculiarities or focus on Putin’s personality and background. By contrast, several recent books—Karen Dawisha’s *Putin’s Kleptocracy. Who Owns Russia?* (2014), Catherine Belton’s *Putin’s People. How the KGB Took Back Russia and Then Took On the West* (2020) and Anders Åslund’s *Russia’s Crony Capitalism. The Path from Market Economy to Kleptocracy* (2019)—emphasised that Putin rules the country through the FSB with ever greater repression, and that the FSB operates in symbiosis with organised crime. Therefore, Putin’s background matters. Remarkably, since Putin returned to the presidency in 2012, he has stopped bothering about economic growth, seemingly preoccupied with enriching his friends instead.

A few mistakes need to be corrected. Boris Nemtsov was not a ‘vice minister’ but first deputy prime minister under Yel’tsin (p. 107). The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development does not monitor elections; the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe does (p. 76). Anna Politkovskaya was not murdered in Chechnya, but at her apartment building in Moscow (p. 114).

A reasonable summary of the book is Frye’s assessment that, in increasingly adverse conditions, ‘Russia’s next few years will likely be rocky’ (p. 200). Frye also repeats my favourite observation that ‘Russia is too rich and well educated to be so nondemocratic, corrupt, and illiberal’ (pp. 201–2).

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Dmitrii Trenin, *Novyi balans sil. Rossiya v poiskakh vneshnepoliticheskogo ravnesiya*. Moscow: Alpina Books, 2021, 472pp., h/b.

DMITRII TRENIN’S LATEST BOOK IS A NOTEWORTHY ANALYSIS OF RUSSIAN foreign policy over the past three decades. The issues discussed are based on a comprehensive overview of historical episodes in Russian statehood since Kievan Rus’, focusing in detail on the contemporary period. The author provides a detailed overview of Russia’s current strategy and expresses his reasoned opinion about the effectiveness or failure of Moscow’s foreign policy. The monograph consists of three parts, each devoted to specific periods and problems. Part 1 analyses the unchanging foundations of Russia’s foreign policy throughout all periods of its history. In Part 2, the author provides a brief analysis of foreign policy under Mikhail Gorbachev, Boris Yel’tsin and Vladimir

Putin. Part 3 is a detailed map of Russia's foreign policy in 2020, discussing Russia's relations with different regions and countries.

The author argues that the current political and economic model has exhausted itself. He describes the current situation of Russia, a state with no values or allies that is suffering from 'sovereign loneliness' (p. 41), and claims that Russia will undergo fundamental changes (p. 8). This interesting thesis relates primarily to Russia itself rather than to world order (p. 247). The Russian leadership is motivated not to achieve domination over other states but rather equality in relations with the strongest ones, so that Russia is not subject to the will of an external party (p. 63). Trenin clearly had in mind the rulers of the Russian Empire, based on my observations as someone who has obtained a history education. For example, during the reign of Catherine the Great (1762–1796), an ethnic German, the Russian aristocracy declared that no cannon in Europe may be fired without the approval of Russia (p. 73).

Trenin's hypothesis concerns the hierarchy of institutions that make decisions in Russian foreign policy as represented by the following Moscow place names: the Kremlin, Staraya Square, Smolenskaya Square, Arbatskaya Square, Lubyanskaya Square and the district of Yasenevo (p. 11). These are the locations of important institutions: the Presidential Administration, the Foreign Ministry, the General Staff of Armed Forces, the FSB (Federal Security Service) and the SVR (Foreign Intelligence Service).

In his discussion of the hierarchy of states in international relations, it is noteworthy that Trenin does not assign the role of a great power to Russia. His division is as follows: superpowers (the United States and China), great powers (Russia, India), medium powers (Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia) and small powers (North Korea, Qatar) (p. 11). The author describes Russia as a 'post-imperial' and 'post-superpower' state (p. 306); meanwhile, along with China and the United States, it is still a 'great military power' (p. 291).


According to Trenin, Russia in its two past forms—the USSR and the Russian Empire—perished due to the erosion and collapse of the officially prevailing value systems (pp. 49, 230). Trenin writes that the most serious factor behind the nation's weakness is 'the low moral character of the elite; as for the latter, Putin failed to form it better' (p. 77). Although the author very skilfully avoids direct reference to the current realities of the Putin regime, the non-naïve reader understands what is being discussed here. In one example: 'At the turn of the twentieth century, the irresponsible clique of courtiers supported by Emperor Nicholas II became so interested in forest concessions in Korea that for Russia, it resulted in a military collision with Japan, which in turn ended up in inglorious defeat' (p. 59).

Another theory put forward by the author concerns the role of the state and security in the identity of the Russian people. Trenin states that the main political value for Russians is the power of the state, because of the constant need to restore order at home and survive in struggles with neighbours (p. 50). Thus, since the aggravation of the crisis between Russia and the West in 2014 external security has become the first priority for Russia. Trenin cites the sudden German attack of 1941, which still remains an unhealed wound in Russian memory. He concludes that 'the imperative of security is the most important for the Russian state' (p. 55). On this basis, the author proposes the term 'dynamic equilibrium' as a guiding principle for Russia's foreign policy in the coming decades. In other words, Moscow should focus its efforts on the country's internal management and try to establish balance in the external contours of its foreign policy (pp. 266–67, 448).

The monograph, written in non-academic language, deserves some attention. The author pays great attention to the problematic aspects of Russian foreign policy, but he sometimes avoids direct mention of systemic internal problems. The author draws on various analytical methods based on international relations theory but not those of sociological research, which is a drawback. Additionally, the author does not provide any data on the attitudes of the general public and various social groups towards political events. The book fails to analyse the evolution of public opinion on the dramatically changing foreign policy between 2000 and 2020. In the modern world, new means are emerging for

the social sphere to influence politics. In this regard, the issue of regional differences in the sociological preferences of Russians for foreign policy strategies deserves attention.

The book crystallises an ongoing weakness in Russian political science. The author uses both realist and neorealist approaches in his analysis; however, he ignores more recent scholarly concepts and over-emphasises anarchy in international relations (pp. 23, 33, 53, 74), recalling the apocryphal comment by Stalin: ‘Well, how many divisions does the Pope have?’. Indeed, neoliberal theories that focus on institutions are unpopular in Russia. The author also ignores constructivism, the English School and the Copenhagen School. It would be interesting to view Russian politics through the prism of these theories and approaches. Overall, the Russian scholarly community adheres to realism and neorealism, which are also the fundamentals of Russian foreign policy.

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Oleksandr Zabirko & Jakob Mischke (eds), *Protestbewegungen im langen Schatten des Kreml. Aufbruch und Resignation in Russland und der Ukraine*. Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2020, 280pp., €34.90 p/b.

IN THE RECENT PROTEST MOVEMENTS IN EUROPE, THERE IS AN APPARENT East–West divide between the forces fostering protest sentiments and bringing people to the streets. In Western Europe the overarching protest themes of the last 15 years have been economic inequalities (represented by movements such as *Indignados* and Occupy) and environmental issues (Fridays for Future); additionally, identitarian protests have been gaining momentum. In Eastern Europe, the primary grievances sending people to the streets have been connected with anti-regime struggles, encompassing demands for free and fair elections, democratisation and transparent politics, such as in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine.

The Eastern European protest agendas call to mind the protracted and troublesome post-Soviet transformations as well as opposition to the Kremlin’s attempts to inherit the Soviet legacy of power and zones of influence. In the last 30 years of the post-Soviet transition, there have been a handful of examples of frequently erupting protest movements, such as the colour revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine in the first half of the 2000s, the Bolotnaya protests in Russia and Euromaidan in Ukraine in the 2010s, and the recent 2020 anti-governmental protests in Belarus. The consistency of the protests and their outcomes, their cyclical nature and recurring grievances stand in contradistinction to the efforts of post-Soviet elites to stay in power.

A protest momentum is developing and providing hope to the millions who desire change. The following days, months and years after protests require thorough reflections of the events. This is where scholarly analysis is needed, providing analytical, in-depth research and placing events on the ground in the larger frame of historical events, conflicting actors and results. The well-known book series *Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* (SPPS), edited by Andreas Umland, is devoted to generating such expert and scholarly evaluation of the events, politics and social transformations in Eastern Europe.

A recent SPPS volume, *Protestbewegungen im langen Schatten des Kreml. Aufbruch und Resignation in Russland und der Ukraine*, allows us to delve into the causes, actors, motivations and outcomes of protest movements during the first half of the 2010s. Edited by Oleksandr Zabirko and