

# BOOK REVIEW:

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“Russia in a Changing World” edited by Glenn Diesen  
and Alexander Lukin.

**REVIEWED BY NAGHI AHMADOV**



**“Russia in a Changing World” edited by Glenn Diesen and Alexander Lukin.**

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*Reviewed by Naghi Ahmadov*

The modern world is in a state of constant structural changes that have taken place over the past 30 years. The existing political reality is affected by a huge number of challenges and threats, which lead to its systemic instability. Today, the world is undergoing a transformation, new actors are emerging that challenge the existing international order. At the same time, a new world order is being formed based on the principles of multipolarity. Against this background, *Russia in a Changing World* edited by Glenn Diesen and Alexander Lukin is certainly a valuable contribution to scholarly discussion of the position of Russia which is closely associated with the emergence of new international political configuration. Will the multipolar order be established peacefully and will it impose the constraints and order as theorized? What risks and opportunities do raise as the world transforms from the unipolar to the multipolar? How will Russia navigate its way into a new world order? The book provides the reader with a summary of the aforementioned questions.

Dr. Glenn Diesen is a Professor at the University of South-Eastern Norway (USN), and an editor at the *Russia in Global Affairs* journal. His research focus is Russian foreign policy, and security institutions in the European post-Cold War security architecture. Diesen’s latest books are: “Europe as the Western Peninsula of Greater Eurasia: Geoeconomic Regions in a Multipolar World” (forthcoming); “The Return of Eurasia” (forthcoming); “Great Power Politics in the Fourth Industrial Revolution: The Geoeconomics of Technological Sovereignty” (2021); “Russian Conservatism: Managing Change under Permanent Revolution” (2021).

Dr. Alexander Lukin is a professor of International Relations at National Research University Higher School of Economics. He is also Director of the Center for East Asian and Shanghai Cooperation Organization Studies at Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO-University). He received his doctorate in politics from Oxford University

in 1997. He worked at the Soviet Foreign Ministry, Soviet Embassy to the People's Republic of China, and Institute of Oriental Studies of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. He was a visiting fellow at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University from 1997 to 1998. From 2000 to 2001, he worked as a research fellow at the Center for Northeast Asia Policy Studies at the Brookings Institution. He is the author of *The Political Culture of the Russian Democrats* (Oxford University Press, 2000) and *The Bear Watches the Dragon: Russia's Perceptions of China and the Evolution of Russian-Chinese Relations since the Eighteenth Century* (M.E. Sharpe, 2003), along with numerous articles and policy papers on Russian and Chinese politics.

In *Russia in a Changing World* editors Glenn Diesen and Alexander Lukin bring together contributors to explore the tectonic changes in the world that have emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. This thought-provoking and analytically helpful collection aims to present a comprehensive view of leading Russian foreign policy experts on the Russia's place in the changing structure of the new international order. The authors here work closely with the high-level decision makers of Russian Federation and are affiliated with influential universities and think tanks, such as the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) and the Valdai Discussion Club.

The volume is organized around ten interconnected themes, each of which presents Russia with both threats and opportunities as the world transforms from a unipolar to a multipolar system and shifts from the West to the East. Restructuring of global value chains, environmental degradation and water scarcity, green energy, secessionism and regional integration, and the crisis in liberalism are, among others, engrossing subjects discussed here.

The book begins with introduction part which outlines a brief description of each chapter. Chapter 1, *the Military Underpinning of the Geopolitical Revolution*, deliberates on the military foundation of the present power shift from the West to the East. Sergey Karaganov, who has written extensively on Soviet and Russian foreign policy, also observes that the most important tendency in international politics is the relative decline of the West and the rise of other powers, in particular China. He argues that correspondingly this weakening is the main

reason for the deepening Cold War-like rivalry today and the main reason of this decay is the loss of the military superiority that Europe and the West enjoyed for the last half a millennium. (p.5) To advocate one's interests, institutions, and culture, Karaganov, approaching from the perspective of realist paradigm, claims that military power is fundamental. As an argument to support his thesis Karaganov contends that nuclear weapons played major factor of international politics of the twentieth century, and it still proceeds. (p.9) Karaganov's main thesis is that Russia has "midwived" the return of a global balance of power and expanded the freedom of choice to the countries and peoples of the world. According to him Russia's military and political revival has created more favorable conditions for dozens of countries wanting to develop freely (p.18). Karaganov states that the West made two major strategic miscalculations: first, by anticipating that China would become more democratic as a result of its development in the open global market; second, by launching "Cold War" against China which pushed Russia and China to build a semi-alliance (p.19). Karaganov concludes that two global geoeconomic and geopolitical macro-centers — "America +" and Greater Eurasia — will take shape (p.20). He adds that the formation of a new global order cannot happen until a new balance of military power is established (p.22).

Chapter 2, *Prefabricated World Order and its Decline in the Twenty-First Century*, elaborates the decline of the post-Cold War world order and the inadequacy of dealing with Russia. Fyodor Lukyanov claims that the disintegration of the Soviet Union generated a condition where a "common European home" could be built using Western European and Euro-Atlantic integration templates (p.24). However, referring to Sarotte, Lukyanov affirms that "Russia was left on the periphery of a post-Cold War Europe" (p.27). As stated by Lukyanov, excluding Russia as an equal in the restructuring international order brought about a sense of inferiority (p.25). In this respect, the NATO summit in Bucharest was the turning point. The final document of the meeting, regardless of Russia's opinion, declared moving eastward by admitting Ukraine and Georgia to NATO (p.29). The military operation against Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 clearly showed that Moscow no longer intended to look passively at the NATO's expansion of zone of influence (p.30). According to the Russian expert, the Ukrainian crisis put an end to NATO's eastward expansion (p.32). The overall

conclusion from this chapter is that the “prefabricated model” of the post-Cold War period cannot be applied anymore in accordance with the global shifts in the world that have taken place since the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The following chapter, *Russia and the Changing World Order: In Search of Multipolarity*, discusses Russia’s search for a multipolar world order by constructing a Greater Eurasian region. Alexander Lukin explores how the Ukrainian crisis turned out to be a critical point as Russia headed off to Asia. That paragraph shows that the allure of the West is waning, along with the rise of non-Western powers (p.42). Lukin points out that the economic success of China, parallel with the failure of the liberal development model, brought into question the universal validity of democratization, market economics, and free trade (p.44). On page 47 it says: “*In the long term, a rising China will present a much bigger challenge to the Western ideology of global dominance than Russia, which remains weak. China, the world’s second-largest economy and most densely populated country, poses a threat not because of its military capabilities, which still fall short of the United States’ and even Russia’s, but because communist China has succeeded where the Soviet Union failed: it has built an effective and attractive economy that is not based on the Western political model.*” Thus, this is a perilous state for the West as it challenges its fundamental assumption that an economy can be effective and generate prosperity only if a country accepts the ideology of democratism. In a thoughtful conclusion, Lukin observes that Russia in this transitional international system shifting toward greater diversity is positioning itself as the linchpin of Eurasian integration (p.68).

Russia’s economic restructuring for the fast-changing future is discussed at length in Chapter 4. Leonid Grigoryev contends that the future of the Russian economy depends on several major factors: national institutions for development, human capital, technological and financial resources, and external environment (p.71). This chapter further argues that economic instability in recent years proved that the institutional setting in Russia is not adequate for fast growth in the long term (p.83). Grigoryev therefore suggests that the complexity of economic policy and transition to a post-industrial society lies in the incomplete institutional changes. Grigoryev pays particular attention to the oligarchic capitalist system, brain drain, outflow of capital, and

an increase in social inequality. (p.84). In this sense, the chapter offers that the success of this path is only expected by the completion of the transition to an effective institutional framework and the rational use of Russia's vast human, natural and productive capital.

Chapter 5, *Securitizing Her Foreign Economic Policy: Evolution of the Russian Security Thinking in the 2010s*, observes how Russian security thinking has evolved over the past two decades and the goal of Russia's security doctrine shifted from ensuring national security through integration and cooperation with the West to the idea of reducing Russia's dependence on the West. Maxim Braterski believes that more open trade in general increases a country's dependence on its trading partners and thus increases economic instability and weakens the country's political autonomy. (p.92)

In chapter 6, issues with ideological conflicts are critically discussed. Glenn Diesen deems that ideology has a potent influence on international relations, because it establishes a framework for international order and promotes foreign policy agendas by mobilizing domestic and foreign resources. Diesen focuses on the crisis in liberalism which stimulates the rebirth of the ideological rivalry. According to the author, after three decades of the end of the Cold War, ideological tensions are re-emerging and becoming a key component of the changing international system (p.105). Also, Diesen claims that the post-Cold War era can be defined by liberal hegemony as the US sought to broaden its influence through promotion of liberal norms (p.110). Diesen highlights that the inability of Western leaders to address the failure of liberalism undermines the legitimacy for its rule in the new world order, which subsequently creates a large vacuum to be filled by various experimental ideologies. In his opinion, the liberal international order breaks down due to the failure of accommodating rising powers, such as China and Russia (p.111). He posits that after the Cold War, the capitalist–communist split turned into a liberal-authoritarian one (p.119). Diesen summarizes that the crisis in liberalism gives Russia both opportunities and threats (p.121).

The next chapter discusses the risks and opportunities for Russia as the world transforms to an increasingly green economy. This chapter answers the question of how the green transformation of the global economy affects the Russian economy. The move towards green technologies, in Igor Makarov's view, undermines Russia's economic

model that has been excessively reliant on oil and gas. Makarov leads to a conclusion that this is a new reality to which the Russian economy and political system must adapt (p.141).

In Chapter 8, Alexander Kurdin assesses the altering energy market in world politics. The chapter discloses basic notions of global energy governance and the role of Russia in the world energy system. Kurdin argues the global energy landscape is changing under the influence of technological advancement, as well as, due to ongoing regulatory reforms at national and international levels (p.144). The author describes the potential development of Russia's role and energy politics by taking into account heterogeneous global energy scenarios. Kurdin concludes that because of the ongoing energy transition toward more sustainability Russian energy export markets are subject to vulnerability (p.160).

Chapter 9 explores the global water outlook and the prospects for Russia. Anastasia Likhacheva contends that Russia stands first in Greater Eurasia and second in the world in terms of renewable freshwater resources. Nevertheless, in the author's perspective, Russia's involvement in the global water agenda seems virtually unfitting. (p.161) In the concluding part, Likhacheva sums up that there is a clear gap among the water capacities of Russia and its passive position in global and regional water agenda setting. She provides some recommendations for Russian decision-makers on bridging this gap (p.161).

The book's last chapter provides insight into the nature of two major trends in contemporary world politics: supranational integration and the decomposition of the nation-state. Ivan Krivushin emphasizes that the most important trend in European political integration in recent decades has been the transfer of power and functions from nation-states to supranational institutions. It was manifested in the formation of the European Union (EU) (p.180). Krivushin discusses that, on the one hand, this tendency complicates Russia's foreign policy-making. On the other hand, this widens Russia's room for diplomatic manoeuvring and increases the opportunities to take advantage of the contradictions between the EU, the nation-states, and the regions (p.195).

To conclude, in this informative and readable book, all the authors draw the reader into topics by developing concise and detailed analysis. One of the most essential highlights of the book is that almost all the contributors reflect consensus that Russia made miscalculations

in the early 1990s, and the current disruptions and transformation of the international system will work in favour of Russia. Moreover, the book is structured coherently. Because of these analytical strengths, Glenn Diesen and Alexander Lukin's work deserves to be considered a groundbreaking attempt to deepen and broaden our understanding of the nature of changing international system and Russia's place in this new world order. Diesen and Lukin, above all, have achieved a valuable outcome in bringing these thoughtful and intriguing essays to light written by insiders who are familiar with the complexity of decision-making in Russian foreign policy. Despite the geopolitical limitations, the volume generally opens interesting avenues for further research in many ways. Overall, this book is highly recommend not only to practitioners or academics who are dealing with international politics, but also to a much wider audience that are interested in international relations more generally.