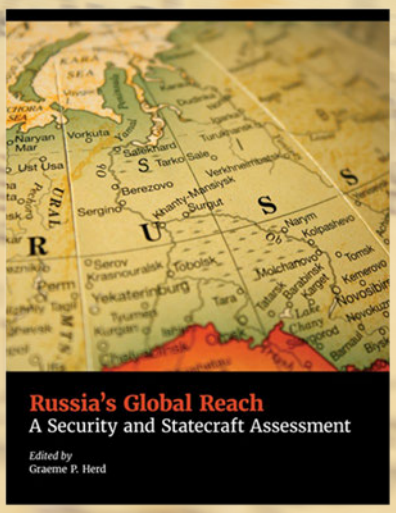

Chapter 1

Understanding Russia's Global Reach

By Graeme P. Herd

Introduction

How should we understand Russia's global reach? What are its implications for U.S. interests and those of its friends and allies? Might this understanding translate into effective policy that upholds U.S. interests and values and those of friends and allies, while still avoiding the risks of miscalculation, escalation, and confrontation. If not, which risks are acceptable, when, and why? Russia engages regions differently, with different objectives, approaches, and roles, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. Studying and understanding these differences could provide opportunities for the United States, as well as its friends and allies, to engage with Russia more effectively in each region. Given Russia's official foreign policy narratives justify foreign policy decisions to both domestic and foreign audiences, we should be careful to distinguish between what Russia says, and what Russia does, between words and deeds, rhetoric and reality.

President Barack Obama described Russia as a "regional power in structural decline." Senator John McClain characterized Russia as "a gas station masquerading as a state." As an unevenly developed Great Power, thus far incapable of structural economic reform, Russia aspires to attain more influence internationally than the size its economy suggests is merited. Assessments of Russia's global reach at the start of the Biden administration highlight Russia's global activism and chart its efforts to resist a U.S.-led international order. Assessments of Russian relative strength and traditional measures of power projection also take into account its capacity to build new relations and instruments that damage and dilute the ability of the U.S. to lead a disrupted global order.[1] At best, Russian global activism allows Russia to pose as an alternative partner to the U.S. and balance western influence; at worst, it raises the costs of U.S. leadership. Russia adopts transactional, flexible, adaptable, non-ideological, and asymmetric approaches to Great Power competition: "Moscow boasts an agile and skilled diplomatic establishment and lacks ethical constraints in pursuit of its objectives."[2] For the Biden Administration, and in the context of a Great Power competition, Russia presents a credibility trap: given Russia's combined strengths and fragility, what is the optimum policy balance that upholds the interests and values of the United States and its friends and allies and also constructively shapes Russian strategic behavior, while avoiding the risk of miscalculation and escalation?

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[1] Kathryn Stoner, "How Much Should We Worry About a Resurrected Russia? More Than You Might Think," *PONARS, Policy Memos*, January 14, 2021, https://ponarseurasia.org/how-much-should-we-worry-about-a-resurrected-russia-more-than-you-might-think.

[2] Paul Stronski, "Late to the Party: Russia's Return to Africa," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, October 16, 2019, https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/16/late-to-party-russia-s-return-to-africa-pub-80056.

Though the administration is only months old, certain approaches are already apparent. The Biden administration promises to be more predictable, professional, pragmatic, experienced, and stable than the Trump administration. Atmospherics have certainly changed. The U.S. under President Biden seeks to emphasize multilateral diplomacy ("diplomacy as a tool of first resort"), using force only when counts, and in a sustainable, and proportional way. However, there are continuities between the two administrations. Each prioritize long-term geo-strategic competition with China. Russia, though, is viewed as a major threat, one that seeks to damage U.S. interests and values and that of its friends and allies. Following President Biden's first phone call to Vladimir Putin, the White House readout reported that President Biden warned that the U.S. would act "firmly in defense of U.S. interests in response to actions by Russia that harm us or our allies."[3] In President Biden's first foreign policy speech, he promised to defend and advance democratic values and human rights and to impose costs and consequences on Russian malign activity in defense of U.S. vital interests, in collaboration with friends and allies. William Burns, at his Senate confirmation hearing, noted:

> Putin's Russia continues to demonstrate that declining powers can be just as disruptive as rising ones and can make use of asymmetrical tools, especially cyber tools, to do that. We can't afford to underestimate them. As long as Vladimir Putin is the leader of Russia, we're going to be operating within a pretty narrow band of possibilities, from the very sharply competitive to the very nastily adversarial.[4]

How then might we assess the challenge and threat of contemporary Russian statecraft?[5] What is the rationale of Russian actions in a global context? To what extent are the ways and means Russia adopts successfully aligned to achieve its strategic ends? What is the relationship between increased Russian activity and success, between completed actions and outcomes leading to positive impacts that advance Russian national interest? Does increased Russian activity translate into greater influence? Does greater influence enable Russia to achieve its preferred policy outcomes outside the historical perimeter of the 400-year-old Russian empire? Does the external perception of Russian success trump reality or are they aligned?

Going Global: Russia's "Spatial Imaginaries"

President Putin has stated that Russian borders do not end anywhere. Russia, though, views and values space, the risks and dangers associated with it, and the functions the different geographies play in Russia's identity and self-perception. These spatial imaginaries

[3] Briefing Room, "Readout of President Joseph R. Biden, Jr., Call with President Vladimir Putin of Russia," January 26, 2021, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/01/26/readout-of-president-joseph-r-biden-jr-call-with-president-vladimir-putin-of-russia/.

[4] "Biden Nominee to Head CIA Sees Russia as a Potential Threat," *RFE/RL*, February 25, 2021, https://www.rferl.org/a/biden-nominee-to-head-cia-sees-russia-as-potent-threat/31120852.html.

[5] Mikhail Troitskiy, "Statecraft Overachievement: Sources of Scares in U.S.-Russian Relations," *PONARS, Policy Memo*, no. 619, October 2019, http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/statecraft-overachievement-sources-scares-us-russian-relations.

> provide cognitive frames that filter information and provide meaning for events, while legitimizing particular policy decisions. They play an important role in asserting boundaries between "them" and "us," and thus constructing and shaping national identities constituted by difference.[6]

The mental maps of Russian elite groups, including strategic decision makers and shapers, increasingly converge, consolidate, and align with Putin's foreign policy agenda, according to the Survey of Russian Elites (SRE). Influential core makers and shapers of Russian policy and practice ascribe different values, significance, sentiment, emotion, and interest to different strategic spaces. Official narratives and discourses, state-controlled media, and Russian foreign policy doctrines and strategies highlight these differences.

What are these different strategic spaces? Russia constructs and engages with five "spatial imaginaries." First is Belarus and Ukraine as part of an East Slavic Orthodox foundational core of "one people," one language, one history, one culture, and one religion. They are "territories of historical Russia," not independent sovereign states; as such, they constitute the central to core non-negotiable national interest, over which Russia will go to war to prevent loss. Second is the wider hinterland of former Soviet space, over which Russia should have an ordered producing and managerial role, demonstrating that Russia is a center of global power in a multi-polar world order. Hegemonic regionalism reflects Russia's desire to have a voice and veto in the geographically-contiguous buffer space between Great Powers (Brussels and Beijing) which, more positively, also allows Russia to play the role of "civilizational bridge" through to South and East Asia within the international system. Third, Europe's function in Russian strategic identity is to validate Russia's exceptional civilizational identity as a besieged fortress and alternative model. This narrative argues that Europe consists of U.S. vassal states, puppet states incapable of strategic autonomy, and that the puppet master, the United States, is a Great Power. Fourth is the United States. From a Russian perspective, its own nuclear triad gives it parity, equality, and reciprocity with the United States. The U.S. serves as Russia's strategic benchmark and because of its own Great Power status, the U.S. represents for Russia a "dignified foe." However, the U.S. economy is twelve times larger than that of Russia; its GDP per capita is five times larger; and it has a larger defense budget and more soft power than Russia. Thus, in reality, Russia is itself too strong to accept U.S. tactical ally status but too weak to be a full-fledged strategic partner. The power-status disparities between Russia and the U.S. and Russia's perception of the leader-subordinate nature of transatlantic relations makes sense of Russia's strategic calculus. What then of the fifth imaginary: the wider globe? As only superpowers have global reach, Russian status-based activism and presence evidences its first tier global power.

This book focuses on the last three imaginaries: Europe, the United States, and the wider global context. Russian global activism secures two core foreign policy strategic goals: to be a strategically independent, autonomous actor in the international system and to uphold its exceptional Great Power identity (status, honor, respect, prestige, and equality). Putin came to power in 1999-2000 and assumed a legal-rational ("dictatorship of the rule of law") legitimation of his political authority. By 2011-2012, a shift was underway, from legal-rational to historical-charismatic ("No Putin, no Russia") legitimation. By 2020-21, Putin legitimizes his political authority increasingly through national-patriotic mobilization and coercion, and Putin presides over a fully-fledged authoritarian regime and police state.

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[6] David G. Lewis, "Geopolitical Imaginaries in Russian Foreign Policy: The Evolution of 'Greater Eurasia,'" *Europe-Asia Studies*, 70:10, (2018): 1612-1637, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09668136.2018.1515348?af=R.

Core characteristics of the regime can be listed. First is an absence of a rotation of power and lack of any liberal or democratic impulses or even an authoritarian modernization project, i.e., late Putinism lacks a positive agenda. Repression of the opposition and wider civil society is not the same as mobilizing supporters around a compelling vision of the future. Second, the marketing of external and internal threats binds a passive, conformist, indifferent, and apathetic majority of the population to the state to legitimize the regime and keep it safe. Third is the all-pervasive presence of the state, which manifests itself by Praetorian Guard capitalism; an economy marked by low dynamism, reflecting the lack of a law-based state; high levels of raiding; and a disproportionate allocation of resources for prestige state projects.

In an address to a Federal Security Service Board meeting on February 24, 2021, President Putin addressed what he termed the United States' "so-called containment policy towards Russia." Attaining these goals—whether in reality or the rhetoric of state-controlled media—legitimizes Russian elite political authority and so justifies their continuity in power. President Putin stated:

> This is not competition as a natural part of international relations, but a consistent and highly aggressive policy aimed at disrupting our development, at slowing it down and creating problems along our external perimeter and contour, provoking internal instability, undermining the values that unite Russian society, and ultimately, at weakening Russia and forcing it to accept external management, just as this is happening in some post-Soviet states…[7]

Russia perceives itself as a besieged fortress, surrounded by U.S.-directed external adversaries; those who support the current regime argue that only the continuity of a strong leader in the shape of Putin and the loyalty of a highly professional "new nobility"—the *siloviki*—can protect Russia and safeguard its future. Thus, Russian foreign policy ultimately serves to ensure the continuity of Putin and Putinism.

Five Core Ways and Means

How does Russia align its ways and means with its strategic goals? What are the principal ways and means? Russia maintains its Great Power strategic relevance through global hotspot engagement. It cultivates the role of neutral mediator and honest power broker, one able to provide a constructive stabilizing presence. It projects itself as alternative partner to the West, the upholder of principles of respect for international law, equality, and non-interference in the internal affairs of states, the peaceful settlement of disputes, and a commitment to multilateral actions. It is a sovereignty and security provider. Russia advances its economic interests to secure political influence. The purpose of the thematic chapters in Section III is to provide a deeper dive on specific tools that Russia can deploy to achieve its strategic ends within a global context.

Russia maintains its Great Power strategic relevance through the exercise of its veto power and spoiler role in global hotspots, leveraging its United Nations Security Council Permanent Five (UNSC P5 status), and on issues of "strategic stability" (nuclear issues) and outer space. Russian interventions project power over choke points in the eastern Mediterranean

[7] "Federal Security Service Board meeting," President of the Russian Federation website, February 24, 2021. Unless otherwise indicated by a web link, all Russian sources are from BBC Monitoring Service.

and Suez (through its new naval base in Sudan) and in Libya and Syria, Russia has the ability to control migration, trafficking, and energy flows. Though Russia is less able to dictate outcomes, it can complicate and threaten the security interests of the U.S. and its friends and allies. Russia demonstrates that direct military intervention to resolve strategic challenges can be swift, effective, and garner international support, not isolation. Russia utilizes force multipliers. It is prepared to take greater risk and this constitutes a strategic advantage over risk-averse adversaries in zero sum contexts. As Putin's political system is highly centralized, this allows for a short and thus fast decision-making cycle; this gives Russia a comparative advantage with adversaries. Proximity to Eurasian hotspots; rapid deployment; UNSC veto; organizational creativity; cheap operational costs; and land grab *fait accompli* with no third-party intervention are also advantages. In purchasing power parity terms, effective military expenditure "is more in the range of $150–180 billion per year, with a much higher percentage dedicated to procurement, research and development than Western defense budgets…. There is well over 1 trillion rubles of military expenditure in Russia outside of the regular defense budget."[8] Thus, the pursuit of narrow objectives at low cost, utilizing *kompromat* and corruption to suborn politicians, and "active measures" to exert covert influence can make Russia strategically relevant.

Although security politics is the ability to manipulate antagonisms, Russia cultivates a perception of itself as a neutral mediator, an honest power broker, and constructive stabilizing presence. For Russia, the greater the number of players or actors in a given conflict, the more violent and chaotic that conflict becomes, and so the greater the need for mediation. In such cases, Russia can leverage its outsider arbitrator status to become the largest external player and so hold the balance of power and use mediation to build a new status quo. Within conflict states, Russia is able to speak to all sides (incumbents and opposition or "equidistance" policy) and is unhampered by colonial legacies. In Yemen, Moscow works with a Saana-based alliance led by Houthis and a UAE-backed separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) Aden-based group. In the Central African Republic (CAR), Russia has ties to the Bangui-based Touadéra government and the Séléka CPSK-CPJP-UFDR alliance rebels militia group (almost entirely Muslim) in the north of the country. Russia is the only power that speaks to all actors in the Middle East, even those regarded as adversaries: Turkey and the Kurds, Hezbollah and Israel, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, as well as Palestine, Egypt, Iran, Jordan, and the United States. In practice, Russia's effective use of coercive mediation in the Middle East and North Africa has a constructive impact on Russian-Chinese relations, helping to rebalance it. We can also identify instances where the lack of a mediated agreement with external actors, such as Japan and the Kurile Islands/Northern Territories, can be used to consolidate domestic support, enhance regime security, and signal globally Russia's Great Power status; Great Powers do not trade their own territory to the strategic ally of its main adversary, in this case, the United States. Russia views U.S. security assistance and cooperation in zero sum terms. India's embrace, for example, of the "Indo-Pacific" and joint exercises as part of the Quad, is designed, from Moscow's perspective, to undermine Russian-Indian ties, rather than balance China.

Russia finds new geopolitical partners through its positioning as a predictable hedge and balancing alternative to the U.S. outside of the Asia-Pacific. Within the Asia-Pacific, Russia poses as an alternative to China for Japan, Vietnam, India, and ASEAN states. More generally, Russia argues that the world needs a strong, strategically-relevant Russia as multi-polarity diffuses bipolar U.S.-China tensions. Russia seeks to translate resultant influence into United

[8] Michael Kofman, "Russian Defense Spending Is Much Larger, and More Sustainable than It Seems," *Defense News*, May 3, 2019, https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2019/05/03/russian-defense-spending-is-much-larger-and-more-sustainable-than-it-seems/.

Nations General Assembly (UNGA) votes. Russia is able to develop narratives that appeal to societies and elites and tarnish the idea of democracy and the notion of a U.S.-led liberal international order. President Putin, for example, contrasts Russia's approach to cooperation with Africa to the West's desire to "pressure, frighten and blackmail" African leaders in order to "reap super-profits."[9] Russia celebrates ties with Soviet era allies ("traditional relations"), such as Vietnam and Syria. In the Middle East and North Africa, Russia is the key external player in Syria and Libya. Russia is also in negotiations with Iran. Russia is an urbanized, educated, and technologically advanced country but its quality of governance, based on rent-seeking and corruption, is akin to underdeveloped states in Africa and Latin America. Shared and compatible "bad governance" norms enable Russia to interact flexibly with a range of partners and interlocutors in the international system. "Bad governance" is not a hindrance to forging transactional interest-based relations: it provides an ideal operating environment for the promotion of malign influence and activities. Lastly, oil producers with large sovereign wealth funds can look to invest in Russia in order to diversify their investment portfolio away from over-dependence on Western Europe and the United States.

"There can be no security without Russia" is a Lavrovian theme, if not meme. Russia posits itself as a sovereignty and security provider, as a reliable "bulwark against revolutions" and "champion of counter-revolution," ready to share mutual lessons learned on authoritarian controls and anti-protest measures. "Color revolutions" are considered the core threat to regime stability. Russia is able to provide out-sourcing of risk to non-state or quasi-state actors and local partners who are eager to avoid costly military and economic commitments. Russian-Pakistani support for the Taliban in Afghanistan has a direct impact on U.S. interests, as the "Taliban bounties" active measure attests. These proxy forces can create footholds for Russian enterprises (e.g. *Rosoboronexport*, *Rosatom, Rostec),* which can follow through and capitalize on any successes. In return for providing security, Russia gains influence and access to resources, from diamond and gold deposits in the case of CAR and infrastructure and energy in the case of Libya. Russia also promotes security cooperation: Russia has, for example, military and technical cooperation agreements with over thirty countries in Africa. It has renewed its presence in unstable countries and is the largest arms supplier to Africa (35 percent of the total),[10] organizing counter-terrorism training with Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Niger, and Rwanda. Russia perceives security provision as a means of mirroring what it understands to be U.S. Great Power behavior and a means to balance: Venezuela plays the same function of Ukraine in the respective backyards. U.S.-Russian nuclear weapons developments and arms control measures do have implications for Chinese, Indian, and Pakistani approaches to these issues.

Lastly, Russia's global reach seeks to advance Russian economic interests, or more precisely, those in Putin's inner circle who dominate state-owned enterprises where they can privatize profit and pass risk onto the state. The business interests of the core Russian political, economic, and military-security elites (e.g. Aleksandr Bortnikov, Sergey Chemezov, Konstantin Malofeev, Nikolay Patrushev, Sergey Naryshkin, Viktor Zolotov, Igor Sechin, Sergey Shoigu, and Vyacheslav Volodin) allow for corruption, ensure loyalty, and shape Russian interventions

[9] "Text of the Official English Translation of President Vladimir Putin's Interview with State-Owned TASS News Agency on the Upcoming Russia-Africa Summit to be Held in Sochi on 23-34 October," *Kremlin.ru website*, in English, October 20, 2019, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/61858.

[10] Jakob Hedenskog, "Russia is Stepping Up its Military Cooperation in Africa," *FOI Memo* 6604, December 2018, accessed April 4, 2021**,** https://www.foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI%20MEMO%206604**.**

and power projections. Russia's foreign economic policy strengthens oligarchic capitalism at home. It delays the need for structural economic reform and the potential threats this poses to Russia's elite and their desire for continuity in power. Russia seeks to sanction-proof itself and this calls for alternative partners in new non-western markets. Russian exports to the Middle East, for example, include arms sales, machinery, oil and gas, as well as petrochemical, metallurgical, and agricultural products. The Middle East is also a core destination for Russian grain exports. These exports offset the negative effects of Western-imposed sanctions. Growing digital and artificial intelligence collaboration with China allows for the development of non-Western technology and expertise. Russia's integration into the global financial system through the internationalization of the stock market allows Russian elites to raise capital from foreign investors and legitimize their wealth without improving the local business environment (which would entail a rule of law not rule by law and a reduction of levels of corruption).[11] Russia is also a key player in the global energy nuclear market, accounting for 7 percent of the world's uranium production, including "20% conversion and 45% enrichment of this element, as well as for the construction of 25% of nuclear power plants in the world."[12] Russia is adept at monetizing conflict, able to sell weapons to both sides in the same conflict. In Africa, for instance:

> Russia primarily exports the Soviet Union's heritage: our officials are travelling to Africa for old time's sake, plus Russian weapons are actively coming there. Our weapons are competitive goods on the continent; they are quite cheap and reliable. And these arms deliveries, unlike those from the United States, are not burdened, for example, by human rights requirements.[13]

Structure of the Book

Following this short introduction in Section I of the book, Section II proceeds to provide a cross-regional comparison of how Russia aligns its ways and means to achieve its strategic ends. In this section, each regional chapter adopts the same structure: What are Russia's regional goals and the principal ways and means Russia uses regionally to achieve these ends? What are both the opportunities but also limits and challenges that structure Russia engagement with a given region? This can involve identifying perspectives from within the region of Russia's engagement. What are the implications of the pattern, scale, and scope of Russia's presence and actions for the United States, as well as its friends and allies? Lastly, given this, what recommendations do the authors propose? These recommendations aim to uphold U.S. interests and values, avoid escalation and miscalculation, and be cognizant of the wider implications of Great Power Competition with China.

To these ends, in Chapter 2 Suzanne Loftus addresses Russia's relationship with the United States, its main adversary. In Chapter 3, Pál Dunay examines Russia's relationship with European Great Powers: the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. Chapter 4 benefits from Pavel Baev's insight into Russia's role as a polar Great Power. These three chapters help

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[11] Igor Logvinenko, "Local Control and Worldwide Access: How Russian Elites Have Comer to Use the Global Financial System to Defend their Wealth," New Voices on Russia, Video Presentation, Youtube, April 17, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVFyxHy8vzA&list=PLnYhtecpqY0hV3gP0l3itQieQLZhkCj4e&index=11.

[12] Lyubov Glazunova, "Russia's Nuclear Chain Reaction in Africa," *Riddle*, October 21, 2019, https://www.ridl.io/en/russia-s-nuclear-chain-reaction-in-africa/.

[13] Arnold Khachaturov, Anastasia Torop, and Maria Yefimova, "They end up in tropics: Russia returns to Africa with pomp to repeat past mistakes," *Novaya Gazeta*, Moscow, in Russian, October 28, 2019.

characterize the nature of Russia's relationship with the institutionalized political West. Fabiana Perera's Chapter 5 examines Russia's relations with Latin and South America. We then leave the Western Hemisphere to enter the Indo-Pacific where Wade Turvold, Michael B. Dorschner, and Michael Burgoyne offer Chapter 6 with its focus on Russia and China, while Chapter 7 addresses Russia and North East Asia, taking into account relations across with the Republic of Korea (Korea), Taiwan, Mongolia, and Japan. Moving westwards, John Gill identifies the core dynamics in Chapter 8 and Russian-South Asia relations, with a focus on Pakistan and India, before Gawdat Bahgat turns our attention in Chapter 9 to Russia and the Middle East. Section II ends with Joseph Siegle's Chapter 10 on Russia in Africa.

Having crossed the globe and compared and contrasted Russian engagement in key regions, we now switch our attention in Section III to analysis of Russia's deployment of power capabilities to achieve its strategic ends. Each of the five chapters in this section demonstrates the utility of the tool and its relationship to Russian strategic goals. We examine how the instrument has evolved over the last two decades—the era of Putin and Putinism—in order to highlight trends. We seek to identify the factors that enable and benefit the use of the tool, and which factors limit its utility, before concluding with recommendations.

In Chapter 11, Pavel Baev addresses the role of Russian nuclear instruments and its approaches to arms control, a dimension of power that places Russia on equal footing with the United States. Pál Dunay proceeds to draws our attention in Chapter 12 to how the structure of Russia's economy shapes Russia's global economic engagement. In Chapter 13, David Lewis highlights Russian diplomacy and its approach to conflict management though its mastery of coercive mediation. The sharp end of coercion is the focus of Chapter 14 by Mark Galeotti. The management of Russia's covert active reach and how such "guerilla geopolitics" supports Russian foreign policy is assessed. The preceding chapters all highlight what Russia does and how it does it. Chapter 15 brings Section III to a close with a survey by Dmitry Gorenburg of Russia's strategic messaging, propaganda, and disinformation efforts.

Section IV consists of one chapter. Chapter 16 takes us back to the introduction and offers a statecraft assessment in light of the findings in the regionally-specific (Sections II) and thematic (Section III) chapters, focusing on the extent to which Russia is able to align its ways and means to best effect to support its strategic goals. In light of this assessment, and given the new administration's unfolding policy toward Russia, what might our collective policy considerations be? These reflections also constitute the Executive Summary.

About The Author

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