

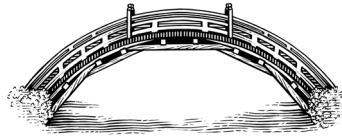
BOOK REVIEW ROUNDTABLE

Bobo Lo's

Russia and the New World Disorder

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Putin's Ideology of Multipolarism

Kimberly Marten

In his magisterial new analysis of Russian foreign policy under President Vladimir Putin, *Russia and the New World Disorder*, Chatham House fellow Bobo Lo argues that the Kremlin's understanding of the current international environment is almost Marxist-Leninist in its teleological underpinnings. While in Soviet times Moscow's ideology foresaw the inevitable triumph of socialism led by the USSR, Lo describes Russia's current focus on the inevitable decline of the West and the triumph of a non-Western (and even anti-Western) multipolar order in which Russia will play a key role. Lo believes that this ideologically tinged version of geopolitics leaves Putin poorly equipped to deal with complex global realities. Although Putin has scored tactical victories against U.S. president Barack Obama and other Western "opponents" through his quick and flexible actions in Ukraine and Syria, Lo argues that Putin's strategic vision is in contrast inflexible, flawed, and ultimately doomed to send Russia even further into relative decline because of its transparently instrumentalist cast. Most importantly, Lo observes that the Kremlin's neo-imperial image of Russia's proper role in the post-Soviet space will undermine its relationships in Eurasia.

Russia and the New World Disorder is comprehensive in scope, dealing with everything from foreign policy decision-making to a review of the most pressing issues in the current international environment. It includes sections on Russia's views of international governance and what Lo sees as Russia's "imperial spirit" (p. 101), as well as a broad overview of Russia's recent relationships with both the East and the West. Lo's 2008 book, *Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing, and the New Geopolitics*, focused on Russia's developing relationship with China, and many of his earlier observations on Russia's eastward turn are reprised and updated in this new volume. The new book's significant sections on Eurasia and the Asia-Pacific region are particularly welcome in an academic environment that often privileges analysis of Russia's relations with the West. Lo's discussion of how Russia defines "Asianness" is useful (pp. 133–34), as is his observation that Russia's Asia policy seems unduly centered on China.

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Lo also pays significant attention to the potential future trajectories of Russian foreign policy. Chapter eight lays out four scenarios for Russia's foreign policy development by the year 2030, based on differing predictions about the direction of Russia's domestic political evolution. One weakness of this section is that the scenarios are presented without any sense of the political incentives and realities that would drive them—and without attention to the myth-making philosophy of Putinism that Lo explores so well in the earlier sections of the book. He portrays a turn to “second-wave liberalism” (p. 239) as equally likely to develop as “hard authoritarianism” (p. 234) without much explanation of the changes needed to achieve a more liberal outcome from where Russia is today. In chapter two, “The Domestic Context of Foreign Policy,” Lo deftly shows how the Kremlin's foreign policy has matched and reinforced the historical myths and resulting perceived interests held by much of the Russian elite and mass public. As Lo writes, “the stars are not aligned in favor of change” (p. 37), so it is not clear what would drive such a liberal shift.

In a departure from standard academic practice, Lo also includes a chapter (chapter seven, “A New Foreign Policy for a New Russia”) that prescribes not only what the West should do toward Russia but also what Russia should do to reform its own foreign policy. While it is unlikely that Putin will pay attention, Lo's logic is convincing.

The very comprehensiveness of the book, by definition, forces a certain superficiality of analysis. For example, Lo argues that the ideas of the late Yevgenii Primakov, who served as director of foreign intelligence, foreign minister, and eventually prime minister under former president Boris Yeltsin, have “underpinned much of Putin's pursuit of a multipolar order” and have “actually become more influential in recent years” (p. 6). In a related footnote (fn. 9, p. 248), Lo dismisses the influence of the geo-ethnic ideas of Alexander Dugin and his neo-Eurasianist philosophy: the notion that Russians have a foreordained role to lead the eastern and central sections of the Eurasian continent because that is what both geography and the natural divisions of culture demand.¹ But while the book notes Primakov's role as the engine behind Russian conversations about multipolarity starting in the 1990s and his unflinching advocacy for putting constraints on U.S. primacy (p. 43), Primakov also signed the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act and rose from what turned out to be almost his deathbed in January 2015 to publicly argue

¹ Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

that Russia's foreign policy direction and lack of economic diversification put it in danger of self-isolation.² In that 2015 speech, Primakov urged the Kremlin to open the door to cooperation with the West both on economic issues and on jointly solving the world's most important security problems. Primakov's statements—that Russia need not fear a “color revolution,” that the Donbas should be recognized as Ukrainian territory, and that Russian troops should never be sent to help rebel militias there—indeed implied that Ukraine was far from the worst security problem facing Russia.³ In other words, the most critical set of foreign policy decisions undertaken by Putin since entering the presidency in 2000—those surrounding military actions toward Ukraine—do not appear to have been due to Primakov's influence. They instead have more than a whiff of Duginism about them.

Despite these small quibbles with its conclusions, this book will certainly leave an important mark. Lo is one of the world's leading experts on Russian foreign policy, and his insights about the internal contradictions and ultimate weaknesses of Putin's choices have value for any serious scholar or policy analyst. Then, too, the very comprehensiveness of the book, as well as its fluid prose, will make it an excellent text for an advanced undergraduate or master's level course on Russian foreign policy.

² Viktor Khamraev, “Akademicheskii Chas: Za 45 minut Evgenii Primakov rasskazal, kak nado vykhodit' iz krizisa” [Academic Hour: For 45 Minutes, Evgenii Primakov Told [Us] What Is Needed to Exit from the Crisis], *Kommersant*, January 14, 2015 ~ <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2645293>.

³ *Ibid.*

A New Russia Framework for the New Order

Agnia Grigas

If there has ever been a time for a comprehensive reassessment of Moscow's foreign policy, the time is now. Since 2014, Russia's annexation of Crimea and campaigns in Ukraine and Syria have highlighted the country's military resurgence and marked a turning point in Russo-Western relations, necessitating new ways of thinking about Russia's role in the world.

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Bobo Lo's *Russia and the New World Disorder* takes on an ambitious agenda of analyzing and positioning Russia's foreign policy in the context of new global conditions where notions of power and international leadership are transformed. Lo's book makes a threefold contribution: conceptualizing the new world order, or rather, the "new world disorder"; analyzing the process and apparatus of Russian foreign policymaking; and assessing Moscow's policies, capabilities, and prospects in this new global context.

Lo's new world disorder is an effort to conceptualize the increasingly evident gap between the expectations of the early 1990s for a unipolar world led by a sole superpower, the United States, and the realities of the 2010s. China's rise, Russia's resurgence, and the United States' more constrained power and leadership in the global arena have raised discussions in some camps (particularly in Moscow) of a multipolar world led by multiple great powers. Lo unpacks these myths of the "decline of the West" and a "multipolar world," demonstrating that these new global conditions are less about multipolarity than conditions of constant change and instability where soft power and small nations matter more than ever before. Moreover, the so-called new poles are underwhelming. China has not been willing to take on greater global leadership, while Russia's capabilities are significantly limited. In this new world, Lo shows that an ability to perform under new conditions and embrace change will matter more for Russian foreign policymaking than Russia's perceived great-power status, sense of entitlement to a sphere of influence, or even traditional military might.

Lo also offers a holistic look at Russian foreign policymaking, examining Moscow's worldview, the different actors involved, and the political culture as well as structural factors, the role of events, and other changing conditions. The examination of the Kremlin's decision-making apparatus and highlighting of the areas of responsibility for key subordinates such as Igor Sechin or Sergei Lavrov are particularly useful. Too often analysts focus on the overwhelming power of Vladimir Putin, the personalization of the regime, and the opaqueness of the Kremlin's decision-making, leading to generic terms such as "Putin's regime" or "Moscow." Lo emphasizes the role of deeper structural factors within Russian foreign policymaking, such as geography and history, which contribute to the country's identity as an empire and civilization and are responsible for its national humiliation complex and sense of being wronged by lost status. The resulting political mindset is "a strategic culture in which hard power is paramount" (p. 19).

In this comprehensive assessment of the main drivers, actors, and tools of Russian foreign policy, it would have been useful to award more attention

to the unique hallmarks of Putin's foreign policymaking—the use of energy influence; creation of transnational networks of commercial and ideological interest groups; soft-power efforts, particularly toward the “Russian world”; and information warfare campaigns.¹ While Russia's soft power and status fall far short of its ambitions and those of the United States, the Kremlin has been largely successful in garnering gains by combining hard- and soft-power methods in the annexation of Crimea, the destabilization of eastern Ukraine, the Russo-Georgian war, ongoing efforts at subversion in Moldova and the Baltic states, and, among others, its recent information warfare campaign against Germany leveraging the European refugee crisis.

One of the book's most valuable contributions is unpacking the dichotomy between Russia's rhetoric regarding the multipolar world and the reality of Moscow's Western-centric foreign policy. Here, the shallowness of Moscow's much-touted “turn to the East” and efforts to position itself as a “Euro-Pacific power” becomes most apparent. Likewise, while the potential of a Sino-Russia axis has worried commentators, Lo exposes Moscow's instrumentalization of its China policy for other global objectives and lays bare the gap between rhetoric and substance (pp. 132–64). Although this book does not delve deeply into the Sino-Russian gas deal in 2014 and its lead-up, Lo's analysis confirms that the deal will be geopolitically and bilaterally underwhelming, particularly as China will leverage its energy diversification strategy and will be in a position of strength when negotiating with Russia and its energy companies (pp. 145–48). In addition, Beijing's leverage and growing influence in Central Asia (at Moscow's expense) owing to Chinese gas and oil imports from the region are already evident.

More broadly, Lo debunks Moscow's dreams of geopolitical balancing between Washington and Beijing, demonstrating how, for China, the United States rather than Russia remains the indispensable partner. While Lo rejects the “myth of an authoritarian [Sino-Russian] alliance directed against Western interests and values” (p. 148), it would have been worthwhile for the reader if the potential of a cultural and ideological regime-based affinity would have been further explored beyond China's pragmatism and interdependence with the United States.

In addition to Russian foreign policy toward Asia, the book also assesses Moscow's other main foreign policy vectors, such as global governance, the

¹ The Russian World Foundation, based on the Kremlin's ideological concept, counts 35 million Russians, Russian speakers, and other individuals with cultural affinity to Russia residing outside the Russian Federation.

former Soviet republics, and the West. Lo's analysis is sophisticated and multidimensional, offering a useful overview and framework for further thought on these policy directions. For instance, even though the book was written before Russia's military operation in Syria, the analysis of Moscow's foreign policy vis-à-vis the West, Bashar al-Assad's regime, and domestic considerations offers a useful lens to now assess the Kremlin's Syrian campaign (pp. 16, 179, 210–11).

Though the analysis is insightful, some readers will nonetheless take issue with particulars of the book's foreign policy assessments. For instance, I see Moscow's policies in its near abroad as more subversive and coercive than Lo's economically and culturally driven "postmodern empire." Lo's point that "Putin has not demonstrated any particular commitment to restoring a physical empire, even one limited to a Slavic core of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus" would be debated not least in Ukraine, which has been fighting for its territorial integrity since 2014 (p. 104). Lo argues that a postmodern empire is characterized by "indirect control rather than direct rule" and highlights the distinction between "control" and "conquest" (pp. 102, 110). Yet the significance of such distinctions could have been explored further. Indeed, most understandings of "empire," such as Michael Doyle's in his book *Empires*, do not define it as the physical absorption of territories but rather as the control of the political sovereignty of another state that can comprise a variety of military, political, economic, social, or cultural means.² Thus, both control and conquest appear like traditional means of establishing empire. Considering the Kremlin's "passportization" efforts directed at foreign citizens in the near abroad, the reoccurring hybrid warfare campaigns across the post-Soviet space, and the denial that Belarusians and Ukrainians constitute nations, Russia's "postmodern empire" seems almost classically imperial.

Overall, *Russia and the New World Disorder* is an insightful and analytical undertaking that best highlights the disjunctions between Russia's sense of entitlement, perceptions, and ambitions in light of its modest capabilities and actual performance in changing global conditions. Lo shows that Russia has many attributes to play a role of a great power on the global stage. However, in the world of disorder, belief in the status quo and perceived entitlements do not help achieve foreign policy objectives. Russia's main future foreign policy dilemma will be the growing gap between its preconceptions of the world and the global realities in which

² See Michael W. Doyle, *Empires* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1986).

it will have to operate. For Russia to succeed in new conditions, it must reform and recreate itself as a modern great power; however, whether that can be achieved or whether instead Russia will continue on a path of softer or harder authoritarianism, or even experience regime fracture, remains to be seen.

Bringing Order Out of Chaos: Russia's Aspirations to Greatness

Charles E. Ziegler

Realists argue that Russian foreign policy is not *sui generis*—the Kremlin pursues balance-of-power politics, reacting to threats and opportunities as any great power would under similar circumstances. Constructivists focus on the role of domestic factors and questions of national identity—they see Russia as unique, with national interests derived from Russia's specific historical experiences and cultural characteristics.

Bobo Lo's comprehensive study, *Russia and the New World Disorder*, draws on both perspectives. This method is appropriate since Russian leaders—from Vladimir Putin on down—emphasize Russia's historical and cultural uniqueness, distinct from both Europe and Asia, while adhering to a classic European concept of great-power politics in which Russia deserves a privileged seat at the international table. Russia's idea of equality and democracy in world politics extends only to the great powers, as Lo observes (pp. 65–67). Smaller and medium powers merit little attention. Moscow also remains fixated on traditional security threats, slighting issues such as global warming or infectious disease.

For Lo, the domestic context is critical to understanding Russian foreign policy. He argues that Russia's authoritarian system has less impact on its foreign relations than do structural factors, namely, geography and history. Russian leaders seem to agree. In a recent article, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov emphasized the historical dimension in his country's foreign policy, asserting that Russia has always been a political outsider on the

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margins of Europe.¹ In a speech justifying the annexation of Crimea, President Vladimir Putin stressed Russia's historical links with the peninsula. He also rejected Europe's centuries-long efforts to contain Russia by "constantly trying to sweep us into a corner."² Insecurity is a constant in Russia's external relations. Reflecting a classic security dilemma, Moscow's preoccupation with military power and aggressive behavior generates fear and insecurity in other states, a process that Russian leaders either cannot or will not understand. NATO expansion may have been driven by Washington's goal of consolidating its position in post-Cold War Europe, but Russia's smaller neighbors welcomed the NATO security umbrella as insurance against a revanchist Moscow.

Lo does not take sides in the debate over who is responsible for NATO expansion and the current tensions in Europe, though his characterization of Russia as a postmodern empire tends to align him with Moscow's critics. Russians view international politics as a zero-sum game, with great powers competing for influence among smaller powers, and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics are viewed through this prism. Thus, NATO's enlargement is framed as a challenge to Russia's hegemony instead of a rational response by weaker states to perceived threats from Russia.

In recent years, neo-Eurasianism has become an important strain of Russian political thought that emphasizes its national uniqueness and has moved from the fringes of discourse toward the center. Putin appears to buy into the perspectives of prominent Eurasianists such as Alexander Dugin, who draws on Halford Mackinder's notion of geopolitics as a struggle between sea powers and land powers. In the 21st century, this school of thought positions Russia and China as the leading land powers (and of course Russia rules the heartland), gradually displacing the United States and Great Britain for global prominence. Layered onto this view is the civilizational idea that Russia is not only distinct from but culturally and morally superior to a decadent West, with the civilizational divides outlined by Samuel Huntington becoming more salient than nation-state boundaries. Russia, then, is both a nation-state and a civilizational core.

The 21st century is a challenge for the richest countries and most adroit leaders, yet, as Bobo Lo argues, Putin and his supporters are operating under a 19th-century view of the world that thinks in terms of

¹ Sergei Lavrov, "Russia's Foreign Policy in a Historical Perspective," *Russia in Global Affairs*, no. 2 (2016) ~ <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Russias-Foreign-Policy-in-a-Historical-Perspective-18067>.

² Vladimir Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation" (speech given at the Kremlin, Moscow, March 18, 2014) ~ <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

balance of (hard) power, zero-sum competition, and spheres of influence (pp. 73–81, 98–99). Lip service is paid to economic strength, yet the Kremlin has avoided making the painful reforms that would modernize the country and reduce overdependence on hydrocarbons. Moreover, Russia is building up its military capabilities and plans to invest some \$700 billion in defense modernization by 2020.³ Hard power does have its limits, as Lo argues (pp. 40–42, 56–58), but given its importance for the Kremlin, the subject merits somewhat more attention than he devotes to it.

Lo makes a critical distinction between multipolarity, which is vitally important for Russia, and multilateralism, which is not (pp. 42–47, 73–77). Multipolarity is appreciated because it constrains U.S. power; multilateralism is avoided because it potentially limits Moscow's options. Multilateral institutions are useful to the extent that they advance Russian interests—for example, through the UN Security Council (where Russia wields a veto) or the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Eurasian Economic Union (where Moscow can dominate its smaller partners). When it comes to Western organizations like the European Union, Russia prefers to deal with members bilaterally.

Turning eastward, Russia's pivot toward the Pacific is a poor imitation of the U.S. rebalance. Russia is a marginal player in the region, and despite all the talk about a pivot to Asia, the country will remain closely tied to Europe in the near future, as Lo rightly suggests (see chapter 5 and pp. 196–99). Russia's business and cultural links to Asia are weak. While Asia needs Russia's energy resources and raw materials, Moscow's political inflexibility and inability to diversify its economy do not bode well for greater influence in the region. The Russian Far East could provide a link to the Asia-Pacific, but Moscow's centralized approach to modernization, its unwillingness to grant regions real autonomy, and its tendency toward symbolism over substance (as in the extraordinarily expensive and much-hyped 2012 Vladivostok Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting) virtually guarantee a minor role for Russia in the Asia-Pacific.⁴

But Russia is determined to play a “special role” in world politics, stemming from a conviction that the country deserves to shape world events. This conveniently overlooks the fact that Russia's GDP is about one-tenth that of the United States, one-sixth that of China, and only

³ Dmitri Trenin, “The Revival of the Russian Military: How Moscow Reloaded,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2016.

⁴ Rensselaer Lee and Artyom Lukin, *Russia's Far East: New Dynamics in Asia Pacific and Beyond* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2016).

slightly ahead of that of Australia.⁵ Russian leaders believe their country is exceptional, yet they pursue policies that frequently consign Russia to the periphery of world affairs.

For Putin, stability and a strong state are critical to international order. This viewpoint holds for Russia and for “rogue regimes” like Syria, Iran, and North Korea, with which Moscow has cordial relations. One fundamental source of disagreement with the West is that Moscow believes stability can best be guaranteed through a sovereign Hobbesian state ruled by a strong executive, whereas the West seeks stability through a Lockean framework of law and popular sovereignty. The West’s promotion of law, human rights, and democracy as universal values threatens an illiberal Russia, which rejects liberal hegemony in favor of a “pluralism” of political systems.

Lo concludes his book in chapter eight with four possible scenarios for Russia by the year 2030: soft authoritarianism, hard authoritarianism, regime fragmentation, and second-wave liberalism. He does not indicate which he thinks most likely, but of these possible directions, I would suggest that liberalism is least likely. It was discredited by the chaos of the 1990s, and the appeal of liberal democratic movements in Russia is very low. Perhaps Russians will forget the trauma of the Yeltsin era in another fourteen years, but I doubt it. I believe Lo is correct in claiming that Russia’s future depends on the country’s ability to adapt to the new world disorder. It is worth recalling that historically Russia has shown the greatest promise when it has pursued a path toward Westernization. But Russia’s leaders—and its people—may continue to follow unsustainable policies. Certainly the Western world is not immune from self-defeating behavior. Why should we expect Russia to be different?

The new world disorder is typified not only by rapid technological change and shifting power constellations but also by increasingly decentralized, identity-based forms of political organization (or more accurately, disorganization). Even the best-governed large states find their centers slipping as ethnic, religious, and linguistic communities challenge national unity. In this environment, Russia’s geography and diversity may not be its source of strength, as most Russians believe, but rather an agent of weakness. The fragmentation projected by Lo could be a likely scenario, with the Caucasus, Russian Far East, Tatarstan, or Buryatia breaking off to form a semi-independent statelet comparable to the frozen conflict

⁵ “Gross Domestic Product 2014,” World Bank, World Bank Development Indicators  <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/GDP.pdf>.

zones in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. In criminalizing discussions of separatism, Russian leaders recognize the very real possibility of another breakup, though, as with so many of Russia's problems, the blame is placed on the insidious West. As Lo concludes, unless the Kremlin frankly acknowledges responsibility for Russia's dysfunctional governance and adopts much-needed reforms, the country will increasingly be relegated to the margins of global politics (pp. 242–43).

The Russia We Have

Olga Oliker

With *Russia and the New World Disorder*, Bobo Lo has written an engaging, accessible, and comprehensive overview of Russian foreign policy as it has evolved in recent years. He draws on his extensive experience as a Russia watcher to paint a clear and sobering portrait of Russia's attitudes and actions, region by region and topic by topic. In doing so, he unpacks which aspects of domestic policy are relevant to Russia and which are not, considers the impact of Russia's history on its strategies and tactics, and cogently describes Moscow's approaches around the world.

Lo's overarching thesis is that Russia's perspective on how the international system works remains rooted in the experience and mores of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This, combined with Moscow's related inability to let go of a proprietary attitude toward some of the other states that once composed the Soviet Union, serve the country poorly in a new and evolving global "disorder." As noted above, the book provides an excellent overview of Russian policies. I share with Lo the assessment that Russia is neither neo-imperialist in its attitude toward its neighbors nor completely rid of the baggage of imperialism. I would tend to call this less postmodernist than confused, but in the end that is a matter of semantics. I also agree that the United States remains at the center of how Russia looks at the rest of the world and that the Kremlin is instrumentalist when it comes to international institutions.

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The overview of Russian approaches to Europe (pp. 180–96) is excellent, as is the on-point discussion of Russia’s China-centered approach to Asia and the problems inherent in it (chapter five). A bit more discussion of the Middle East, where Russia has, as it has in Asia, at times found it difficult to clearly define its interests but has now made some significant progress, would have been interesting. The implications for how Russian policy may adapt elsewhere remain underexplored—and worth exploring.

But while Lo’s descriptions of Russia’s policies, their sources, and their effects were to my mind accurate, they did not appear to me to provide evidence for his broader argument.

To say this is not to detract from Lo’s accomplishment. I enjoyed this book, in no small part because I agree with so much of it. But I am not fully convinced that a new world disorder is upon us. Or, if it is, that it takes the forms that Lo describes. Among the characteristics he notes as exemplifying this new universe is a world that has less conflict overall but is nonetheless messier, one in which military power is less valuable, and one in which a continuing paradox exists between a rise in “inclusiveness” and more fragmentation (pp. 56–67). On the whole, these points were underspecified and his lists of changes at times surprised me. I, for one, might have focused more on the information revolution, which is one of the things that has led to some real shifts in how policy is made and, importantly, implemented. I am also fascinated by shifts within societies and cultures around the world and curious as to how these may affect policymaking. But it seemed that Lo actually wanted to avoid specifying this new system too clearly because his point, after all, is that the new world is one of fluidity and change, placing a premium on adaptability.

For my part, I doubt that the world we live in today is that much more fluid than the times that have come before, at least as far as interstate relations are concerned. After all, the notion that change is the only constant is most often attributed to Heraclitus. Indeed, it is unclear whether Lo is all that certain of the disordered nature of our time either. When he talks about Russia’s past, present, and future, the discussion is grounded in historical analogies to other countries, including, importantly, how empires respond to their own end. Despite the change that has been a constant throughout history, the ways in which countries exist, collapse, evolve, trade, and wage war continue to at least appear to follow certain patterns. I do agree that the specifics of change, particularly changes that shift interests for nation-states, are difficult to predict, but this has always been true. And while I agree that Russia is poorly prepared

to adapt, I have my doubts that Russia is worse prepared than other states, including the United States, are or have ever been.

I also agree with Lo that Russia is hampered, first and foremost, by an insistence on interpreting its interests in ways that are inherently in conflict with the goals and interests of others. That is to say, it is not simply that Russia's interests are different but that one of its apparent goals is to have different interests. Russia's particular focus on the United States in this regard deeply hurts Moscow in defining, much less attaining, broader goals. If the central mission of a state's foreign policy is to make a point to another stronger state that only occasionally pays attention, it is difficult to imagine that this policy would be particularly effective in the long term. But a lot of damage can be done in the meantime.

The book closes with four scenarios for Russia's future development (see chapter eight). These scenarios are refreshing in deviating at least somewhat from the four scenarios for Russia that have been the product of the vast majority of such exercises since the late 1980s. But at their core, the scenarios seem designed to underline the advantages of a more long-sighted, forward-thinking approach for Russia itself. That approach is in line with the recommendations that Lo advances to Russian policymakers. I laud the author for arguing that, despite all of Russia's history, its future is not set in stone and that a more effective foreign policy approach is possible. On the other hand, I share his skepticism that the Kremlin will follow his advice. Indeed, it is striking the extent to which Russia has generally ignored all foreign analysts—myself no doubt included—and their excellent ideas for how Moscow could better further its true goals if it could only be made to understand them. It appears that Russia is, for the time being, fairly happy with the goals it has.

Lo's pessimism that Russia will come to its senses shapes his recommendations to Western powers. These states for the most part assume that Russia will continue on a short-sighted path, which suggests that Russia itself is a large source of the disorder in the present system. Moscow's failure to act in its own best interests as defined by other states makes it particularly challenging to respond to—and to predict. My personal concern is that the United States and its allies tend to focus on Russia's potential next steps that worry them each the most (for instance, military attacks on the three Baltic countries), thereby signaling to the Kremlin just how it should keep these prospective adversaries off balance while failing to plan for the things that Russia will do for its own reasons. A large part of the challenge of Russia policy going forward will be finding ways to avoid such pitfalls.

In summary, this is a book worth reading. It is well-organized and provides clear insight into Russian perspectives on foreign policy issues in ways that people from outside Russia will understand. The book's discussions are to the point and concise, but its bottom line is sobering, as it should be. It seems that for the foreseeable future we remain stuck with the Russia we have, not the Russia we might want. It is on all of us, including those in Russia, to identify and implement creative ways forward despite this reality.

The Russian Dream: Power without Substance

Michael Kofman

Bobo Lo's *Russia and the New World Disorder* offers a compelling if dour narrative on Russia's foreign policy, decision-making culture, and prospects in a changing world order. Lo has penned a strategic perspective on Russia, imbued with the knowledge typically found in the field of Russia area studies while grounded within the broader context of international affairs.

The author puts forth an incisive description of Russian strategic culture—i.e., how the country's leaders see the world. Here we find a Hobbesian outlook, best characterized by Vladimir Putin's quote "the weak get beaten." In place of Western multilateralism, Moscow envisions a world of multipolarity in which it expects to be one of the prominent poles. What is striking is that at the center of this vision is a political culture of exceptionalism, perhaps not so dissimilar from that of the United States but bound in the conviction that Russia is a permanent and enduring great power. Russian elites do not aspire to make their country great but to maintain what they believe is its hereditary status as a great power—a quest fixated on perceptions over substance.

Lo finds this vision for the world and Russia's place in it to be illusory. He sees the modern international environment as one in which not only the United States' but all powers' ability to shape events is declining; this world

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is one with fewer followers and deteriorating international norms. At a time when the influence of major powers is waning, Russia's desire to restore the Concert of Powers that existed in Europe after 1815 comes off as anachronistic and unimaginative. From the author's perspective, this is a genesis period, requiring a new model to analyze international relations. The thrust of the book's argument is that the world in which Russia aspires to live does not exist, and much of its foreign policy outlook is based on an illusory foundation that is unlikely to materialize.

Yet *Russia and the New World Disorder* fails to offer an alternative conceptual model for this emerging world, and while Lo chides Francis Fukuyama's claims about the "end of history," and the inevitable dominance of Western liberalism, he commits a similar transgression by announcing the end of multipolarity (pp. 53–57). The discourse on global disorder in this book appears underdeveloped and offers at best an assessment of trajectory. Even if the vision of anarchy is true, is it not from such an environment that polarity typically emerges? If realism is the model of international relations most concerned with how power is distributed in an anarchic world, then Russia may after all have the most suitable outlook for the world Lo foresees. While I agree with the author's view that in all things Russia needs to "talk less, walk more" (p. 210), the conceptual argument for the demise of global authority and norms ironically makes Moscow's brutalist view of foreign policy more appropriate, particularly for an uncertain world in transition.

Where the book's analysis shines is in examination of Russia's foreign policy, an assessment of performance that finds Moscow sorely wanting across the board. In its near abroad, Russia seems to have no coherent or consistent approach to cooperative security. The account paints Russia as a poor regional player, overly fixated on global status as a great power. Policy is ultimately handicapped by the dearth of substance that Moscow offers due to its resource-based economy and authoritarian political system. Having failed to construct a great country, Russia struggles to infuse its foreign policy with substance. Lo rightly describes it as "the antithesis of a modern state, afflicted by a sclerosis more than anything seen in the West" (p. 162).

Throughout his analysis, however, one is left wondering whether in retrospect Russian foreign policy is relatively successful given the lamentably undiversified economy and political system, together with national leadership prone to pursuing form over substance. Although Lo is quite critical of Russia's policy performance, I came away from this narrative uncertain of whether Russia is punching above or exactly at

its weight. One particular omission is the neglect of Russian investment in military power and successful use of force to achieve political ends abroad. Use of force remains the trump card in international relations. Few states are able to project power independently abroad, and in recent times only Russia has contested the U.S. monopoly on the use of force in a conflict (for example, in Syria). Russia's development of military power is significant for its near abroad and relations with the West, but is largely underappreciated or ignored in Lo's assessment.

The book asks the most pertinent question today, whether Russia is a revanchist empire or a continental great power having shed itself of imperial ambition. Lo offers a third narrative, one of Russia as postmodern empire, but one still struggling with its imperial past, having yet to make such a transition. As Lo puts it, "It would be miraculous indeed if Russia's ruling elites were able to transcend history so soon after the demise of the USSR. And of course they haven't" (p. 130). Russia's approach to its near abroad is defensive, seeking to deny other powers influence, and "more calculating than messianic" (p. 128). Lo casts Moscow as differential, placing emphasis on critical states like Ukraine and letting others go.

It is hard to square Russia's actions in Ukraine with Lo's assertion that Moscow has been more calculating—perhaps there is more evidence of overreaction in that particular case. Yet the argument that Russia seems neither a revanchist empire nor a defensive great power is convincing, albeit optimistic. Looking at Russia as still trapped by the inertia of its history would benefit from a better understanding of the post-Soviet space as a whole, tracts of which have failed to escape the Soviet past, while others reverted to old prejudices and tribal and clan-based politics. Lo's argument is ultimately one of strategic patience in analysis, though imperial remnants typically see their military power steadily wane, while Russia has experienced a resurgence, and with it what might be termed imperial recidivism.

The book identifies Russia's self-touted turn to the East as another case of form over substance. Here, Lo sees few prospects for a unified Russian-Chinese opposition to U.S. dominance, arguing that the United States is essential to China's rise and that Russia offers little in the form of credible counterweight. Beijing has little demonstrated interest in a tripolar world where Russia has an equal place alongside China and the United States. In Lo's view there is no authoritarian alliance in the offing. Meanwhile, Moscow's efforts to develop the Russian Far East and become a more visible regional player have equally suffered from a penchant for

colossally expensive show-piece projects in place of substantive development of its regions.

While the book concludes that Russian prospects in Asia are “circumscribed by objective realities” (p. 162) and regional prejudices, its arguments, though analytically well-reasoned, appear overly dismissive, examining each policy or relationship only to discard them in turn. Despite Russia’s supposed failure to achieve geopolitical alignment with China, Lo admits that the country is viewed quite favorably by the Chinese population. Similarly, Russia has managed to maintain defense and technical cooperation relationships with India, Vietnam, South Korea, and Malaysia. It is from long-term transactional relationships that partnerships are often built, and having soured the opinions of much of the world, securing the favor of China’s population is no small accomplishment. Trade volumes alone speak little to what Russia’s defense industry may be getting from these countries, like microchips and electronics boards, and hence miss the more important question today: Will these relationships allow Russia to obviate U.S. sanctions on key sectors of the economy?

Russia is indeed circumscribed in what it can offer, be it as a resource appendage or arms exporter, but the future in Asia is far from written. U.S. handling of China could make the seemingly impossible Sino-Russian entente a reality after all, while Beijing’s own strategic indecisiveness may change in time. Although Russia’s Asia policy has not yielded strategic success, the country’s structural limitations vis-a-vis the East are so profound that any achievement should be looked at with perspective. A snapshot analysis belies the investment Moscow is making in its relations with China while managing to maintain dealings with Beijing’s competitors and regional adversaries. Russian hopes for an alliance with China are unlikely to materialize—as Kissinger once said “it’s not in their nature”—but there is a steady convergence between the two sides that is arguably driven more by U.S. policy than by Russian overtures.

Turning to the West, the book recounts the hopes and vagaries of the U.S. “reset” policy, identifying it as a patchwork policy that lacked a forward-looking vision for U.S.-Russian relations. Here, Lo is decidedly pessimistic, citing the “perennial problem of the values gap” (p. 175), growing militancy on both sides, and Vladimir Putin’s defiant stance. However, the oft-proclaimed values gap has not similarly afflicted U.S.-Chinese relations. The present-day tension in the South China Sea, for example, is not over values but geopolitics. The values gap seems more a fundamental problem for the European dream of a shared home, and here the book demurs on the

more essential question of whether Germany and France have come to see Russia as a continental delinquent or a destructive force.

Lo rejects Russia's deterministic decline as "lazy fatalism" (p. 204) and concludes that revolutionary change is still possible. Yet this may not be an optimistic note since Russian revolutions do not always bring about a better regime. Many analysts regard revolutionary change as the only answer to an ossified system, but Lo's notion of an emerging global disorder is liable to be more accommodating to Russia's current regime and foreign policy outlook.

Author's Response:
Russia and the New World Disorder—One Year Later

Bobo Lo

The review essays collected in this roundtable on my book *Russia and the New World Disorder* raise so many interesting questions that I can only respond to a few of the main points. I will do this under six main headings: (1) the new world disorder, (2) influences on Vladimir Putin's foreign policy, (3) understandings of empire, (4) hard and soft power, (5) successes and failures in Russian foreign policy, and (6) the outlook for Russia in the 21st-century world.

The New World Disorder

Michael Kofman accurately notes that "the thrust of the book's argument is that the world in which Russia aspires to live does not exist, and much of its foreign policy outlook is based on an illusory foundation that is unlikely to materialize." He argues, however, that the book fails to "offer an alternative conceptual model for this emerging world" and claims that I am premature in "announcing the end of multipolarity."

There are several issues here. First, one of the attractions for Moscow of multipolarity, or, to use its favored expression, a "polycentric system of international relations," is that this framework offers a certain clarity

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and structure. However, that is not the way the world works. It is disorderly, unclear, and full of contradictions. And it is the Kremlin's unwillingness to come to terms with the world's complexities that explains much of its failure to address the numerous challenges facing Russia today.

Second, it is misleading to suggest that I do not explain the nature of the new world disorder. On the contrary, I identify a number of key features: the changing nature of power, the end of leadership and the decline of the great powers, the de-universalization of norms and values, and growing inclusiveness and fragmentation (pp. 54–66). It is likewise inaccurate to say that I announce the end of multipolarity. I believe the multipolar world imagined by Moscow is a fiction. But a new polarity could well emerge out of the current “anarchy.” The challenge for Russia is to ensure that it becomes part of this new order if or when it happens. One of the fears in Moscow is that a new Sino-U.S. bipolarity could materialize, with Russia being sidelined due to its failure to modernize and adapt.

Olga Oliker questions whether the new world disorder is either new or especially fluid and considers that I might have given more attention to the information revolution and “shifts within societies and cultures around the world.” I recognize that there is a danger in overstating the stability of the Cold War era; after all, it brought us the Cuban Missile Crisis, not to mention a potentially disastrous misunderstanding over NATO's Able Archer exercise in 1983. Nevertheless, there was an identifiable global system in place with generally clear boundaries, as well as multiple checks and balances. Today, by contrast, the boundaries have become blurred, and relative certainties have given way to mounting uncertainties. The current crisis in relations between Russia and the West is not a systemic confrontation on the scale of the Cold War, but in some ways it is harder to manage because no one quite knows where the red lines are, and because Putin injects a mercurial personal element.

With hindsight, I should have highlighted the impact of the information revolution and of changes within societies, given that both factors have reinforced the new world disorder. We have never had so much access to information, yet public trust in its veracity has rarely been more fragile. Truth has become a ubiquitous commodity. One reason is that trust in democratically elected governments is at a historic low. In the book, I wrote about the “end of followership”—the phenomenon whereby no state, however weak, is willing to take direction from a great power (p. 62). But I should have applied this concept more generally. The rise of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders in the United States, and of far-right

politicians in Europe, highlights a general antiestablishment trend. Russia appears to be one of the few exceptions to the rule. But if that is the case domestically, Moscow's control over the ex-Soviet republics has, by contrast, become weaker.

Influences on Vladimir Putin's Foreign Policy

Understanding the workings of Russian foreign policymaking is extremely challenging, and it is difficult to say for certain what influences have inspired Putin. In their essays, Kimberly Marten and Charles Ziegler have highlighted the neo-Eurasianism of Alexander Dugin. However, although Dugin's ideas have acquired greater respectability, I am yet to be convinced that they are especially influential. Instead, they serve as part of the ideological and intellectual underpinnings of Putin's *realpolitik*. Whereas for much of his rule, he operated on the basis of an informal bargain in which the state provided economic benefits in exchange for political compliance, today's "contract" is different. In return for popular legitimation, Putin is selling national-patriotic memes and "traditional Russian spiritual and moral values." He has decided that, in the absence of economic growth and rising living standards, he needs to tap into the large groundswell of anti-Western sentiment and the hankering for national greatness. Putin is by no means unique in resorting to such methods; we see a similar siege mentality and national patriotism playing out with Trump in the United States, Marine Le Pen in France, and even the Brexiteers in the United Kingdom.

Marten questions whether Yevgenii Primakov has had a significant impact on Putin and points to his criticisms of the latter's Ukraine policy and confrontational approach toward the West. A couple of points in response. In the book, I was talking about Primakov's influence in one particular area—Putin's view of the international system as multipolar. I was not suggesting that Primakov was all-influential. Russian foreign policy has been shaped by many factors—individual actors, a Hobbesian political culture driven by history and geography, political and economic interests, and circumstances and events (pp. 36–37). That said, Primakov has acquired the status of a secular icon, judging by the number of books devoted to him and a big government-backed conference scheduled for later this year.

Understandings of Empire

Agnia Grigas raises a very interesting point about whether Putin's approach to empire is postmodern or in fact quite traditional. She argues

that it has been “more subversive and coercive” than I portray and proposes a definition of empire that centers on the “control of the political sovereignty of another state.” I take the point about subversion and coercion, and the term “postmodern” may seem a little touchy-feely in light of recent events. However, the problem with seeing Putin’s approach to the post-Soviet space as “almost classically imperial” is that it lowers the bar too much. Under this generous definition, we might define the Reagan administration’s approach toward much of Latin America in the 1980s as “imperialist.” Whatever our views of U.S. policy of the time, I think that characterization would devalue the term.

There is also the issue of the degree of control. At what point does Russian policy cross the line from influential to imperialist? Even in Ukraine, Moscow would rather exercise a leading influence than take political control, because the downside of imperialism is that it is so very expensive and debilitating, as the Soviet Union found out. In general, we need to distinguish between different types of empire and imperialism—otherwise, it all becomes one indeterminate mess.

Hard and Soft Power

The most controversial part of the book discusses the relative importance of hard power. Recent events seem to demonstrate that military might and other forms of hard power, such as political and economic coercion, have made a comeback as a “trump card” (Kofman) in international relations. Yet appearances are deceiving. Military force has achieved spectacular operational successes in Ukraine and Syria. But the bigger picture is less clear. Take Ukraine, for example. Moscow has annexed Crimea and made the southeast ungovernable. But in the process it has ensured that Ukraine is more alienated than ever from Russia. Putin’s Eurasian Union project has been stymied, largely because Kazakhstan and Belarus view it as an instrument of Russian imperialism. Moscow’s relations with the West have been hugely damaged, NATO is re-energized, and Russia is uncomfortably dependent on China. Finally, the economy has taken a beating, less because of the direct effect of sanctions than because of the widespread perception (in Asia and the West) that it represents a bad political as well as commercial risk.

Similarly, the Russian military intervention in Syria has achieved battlefield gains but spawned adverse strategic consequences. Relations with Turkey, which had been flourishing despite differences over

Bashar al-Assad, were derailed for many months following the shooting down of a Russian Su-24 plane. Ties with Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states have deteriorated markedly. And Russian influence in Syria faces a long-term challenge in the form of its tactical ally, but ultimately strategic competitor, Iran.

None of this is to claim that military might is redundant. In fact, my book criticizes European governments for operating on this mistaken premise (p. 228). The problem for Russia is the opposite: an overreliance on hard power and an inability or unwillingness to make best use of its soft-power capabilities.

On soft power itself, James Sherr has highlighted the critical distinction between Western understandings of soft power—as power by persuasion and example—and “soft coercion,” which derives from Soviet “active measures.” The use of RT and *Russkiy Mir*, the financing of European far-right parties, and the legions of bloggers all come under the latter (p. 41).

It is questionable, too, whether such methods are especially effective. We should not confuse anti-U.S. and anti-EU feelings in Europe with pro-Russian sentiment. As the book points out, even countries that have long-standing affinities with Russia, such as Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece, still gravitate toward Europe. If the EU is in “terminal decline” and Russia “resurgent,” shouldn’t they be heading in the other direction? The explanation, of course, is that these countries know that the EU—and Europe—has so much more to offer them.

Successes and Failures in Russian Foreign Policy

Kofman asks whether Russia is punching above its weight given its domestic weaknesses. Again, we should separate out the operational and strategic dimensions of foreign policy. Putin has a good tactical eye, as we have seen in Ukraine and Syria. And because of the highly centralized and personalized nature of Russian decision-making, he is able to translate intention into action more efficiently than his Western counterparts, who are subject to multiple constraints.

However, it is a different story strategically, where the failures of Russian foreign policy outnumber its successes. In the post-Soviet space, from Ukraine and Belarus to Central Asia, Russia is notably less influential than when Putin re-entered the Kremlin in 2012. It faces not only the problems of independent-minded ex-Soviet republics and heightened

Western “interference” but also the growing challenge of China, whose economic influence has major geopolitical ramifications.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, Russia’s position in the Middle East is not especially strong, even in Syria. Its influence there prior to the civil war was considerable (if understated) and seemingly secure. Today, things are far messier. It is a similar story with Iran. Although the public dynamic between Moscow and Tehran is cordial, Russia’s position has been weakened as a result of the P5+1 agreement, following which it faces increased competition for influence from Europe, the United States, and China.¹

Kofman claims that I have underestimated the extent of Russia’s success in Asia, particularly given the “structural limitations.” The implication is that Moscow has been doing better than expected. But is that so? The Sino-Russian partnership has expanded considerably over the past decade and should be considered a success overall. Nevertheless, there are clear differences and tensions between Moscow and Beijing—in their approaches to the international system, in their understandings of the multipolar order (which China sees as revolving around its relationship with the United States), and in specific areas such as Central Asia, where Xi Jinping’s One Belt, One Road initiative runs counter to Putin’s vision of reasserting Russian primacy. There is also disappointment in Moscow that cooperation with China has not mitigated the crisis in Russia’s relations with the West. On the contrary, Beijing has taken advantage of the situation to extract especially favorable terms on energy deals, has insisted on tough interest rates on major loans, and is said to have prevented Russian companies from entering the Hong Kong stock market. Moscow’s hopes of using the Sino-Russian partnership as leverage against the West have so far proved illusory.

It is revealing that even pro-Kremlin commentators believe that Moscow’s “turn to the East” has underachieved.² One of the downsides of prioritizing the partnership with China is that Russia’s relations with other Asian countries have suffered. While there are objective constraints, such as distance and lack of population, a broad consensus exists in Moscow that the government could do better. Although it is unrealistic to expect Russia to be a major player in the Asia-Pacific anytime soon, neither need it be peripheral. In this connection, a few arms deals do not a strategic

¹ P5+1 refers to the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany.

² See, for example, Sergei Karaganov, “A Turn to Asia: The History of the Political Idea,” *Russia in Global Affairs*, January 13, 2016 ~ <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/pubcol/A-turn-to-Asia-the-history-of-the-political-idea-17926>.

partnership make. Russia's relationship with Vietnam, for example, is dwarfed by the latter's substantial ties with China, other ASEAN countries, and the United States. It will take much more than the odd high-profile summit for Russia to make its mark in Asia.

If one of the main purposes of foreign policy in an authoritarian state is to reinforce regime legitimacy, Putin's conduct of international affairs might be considered a success. His ratings have boomed since the annexation of Crimea, and the more he is condemned in the West, the more popular he is at home. However, it seems that Putin is not convinced that things have turned out quite as well as he had hoped. The transatlantic alliance and the EU have proved surprisingly resilient in the face of Russian threats, while China has underdelivered. Consequently, he is reaching out to European countries and, to a lesser extent, the United States over Syria and Ukraine—which brings us back to Primakov, for whom strategic balancing between East and West rather than anti-Americanism was key to an effective Russian foreign policy.

Outlook for Russia in the 21st-Century World

The long-term scenarios presented in *Russia and the New World Disorder* have provoked a lot of discussion, and not just in this roundtable. I would reiterate what I said in the book: these scenarios are not intended to be predictive but rather to indicate some of the pathways along which Russian foreign policy might develop. Both Marten and Ziegler expressed some skepticism about the liberal scenario, and I agree it does not look likely today.

That said, 2030 is a long way ahead, particularly when one factors in the accelerating pace of history. Fourteen years from now is more than twice as long as the period between the arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev as general secretary of the Communist Party and the demise of the Soviet Union. Just because something seems improbable today does not mean it will always be so. A few years ago, no one was talking about the potential use of tactical nuclear weapons, much less about armed confrontation between Russia and the West. And although such extreme options remain unlikely, they are no longer unthinkable.

While Western-style liberalism remains thoroughly discredited, it would be unwise to exclude consideration of this model in a long-term scenario—especially if such liberalism turns out to be not very Western. In the book, I speculate that Russia may eventually need to undergo a process

of modernization, because “stagnation would have proved unsustainable, authoritarianism ineffectual, and anarchy abhorrent” (p. 239). As it is, pressure is already growing. Dmitri Trenin, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, believes that in the next five years the regime will have to choose between three options: “reform the economy and dismantle the existing politico-economic setup; go for a wholesale economic mobilization dominated by the state; or keep the system intact and face the prospect of continued decline and possibly an upheaval in the end.”³ The mobilizational model is currently ascendant. But what if it does not work out? Might not the regime then consider some changes, if only to save its own skin?

All this leads to the one relative certainty, irrespective of which scenario or scenarios unfold. Russia faces huge challenges in a disorderly and rapidly changing world. The question is no longer whether it can “catch up and overtake America,” as Khrushchev once promised, but whether it can adapt to a fluid environment that is at odds with its great power-centered view of the international order. As I argue in the book, if Russia can meet that challenge, it has every chance of becoming a leading actor in the new world order that may eventually emerge. But if it cannot or will not, the outlook for Russia will be grim indeed. ♦

³ Dmitri Trenin, “A Five-Year Outlook for Russian Foreign Policy: Demands, Drivers, and Influences,” Carnegie Moscow Center, Task Force White Paper, March 18, 2016 ~ <http://carnegie.ru/publications/?fa=63075>.