

Book Guide

Getting Russia Right

Getting Russia Right offers a practitioner's account of why the great post-Cold War hopes for an enduring U.S.-Russian strategic partnership grounded in free markets and democratic values gave way to a bitter adversarial relationship that puts the United States and Russia on opposing sides of the critical issues in global affairs today.

Summary

As U.S.-Russia relations scrape the depths of Cold War antagonism, the promise of an enduring strategic partnership that beguiled American administrations during the first post-Soviet decades increasingly appears to have been false from the start. Why did American leaders persist in pursuing it, even as Russia grew increasingly authoritarian and bolder in its efforts to thwart American policy? Was there another path that would have produced more constructive relations or better prepared Washington to face the challenge Russia poses today?

With a practitioner's eye honed during decades of work on Russian affairs in and out of the U.S. government, Thomas Graham deftly traces the evolution of opposing ideas of national purpose that created an inherent tension in relations. He shows how differences in geography, geopolitical setting, and historical experience gave rise to two expansionary powers with competing worldviews that inevitably became rivals on the global stage.

Getting Russia Right identifies the blind spots that prevented Washington from seeing Russia as it really is and crafting a policy to advance American interests without provoking an aggressive Russian response. Mr. Graham distills the Putin factor to reveal the character of the immediate challenge Russia poses under his rule, most graphically illustrated by Russia's aggression against Ukraine, as well as the contours of the longer-term challenge the United States will face when Putin departs the scene. On this basis of this analysis, Mr. Graham lays out a compelling way to counter Russia today while preparing the ground for "constructive competition" with post-Putin Russia, with the goal of advancing American interests in a rapidly changing world.

This book is suitable for the following types of undergraduate and graduate course disciplines:

- International Security Affairs
- Strategic Studies
- Russian and Eurasian Studies
- Global Affairs

Main Takeaways

- The post-Cold War U.S. effort to integrate Russia into the Euro-Atlantic community as a free-market democracy ultimately failed because it was incompatible with the deeply held national aspirations and strategic imperatives of both the United States and Russia.
- No matter what happens in Ukraine, Russia will remain a major challenge for the United States. It will be authoritarian, expansionist, and determined to act on the global stage as a great power, even though it will be lagging economically and technologically.
- To defend its long-term strategic interests, the United States needs to treat Russia as a great power, which entails making tradeoffs and compromises to manage the inevitable competition responsibly.
- The United States needs to pursue its goals vis-a-vis Russia with strategic patience, seeking ultimate success in the steady accumulation of incremental advantages over time, as it did during the Cold War.

Discussion Questions

Course on international security affairs:

1. How has history shaped the strategic thinking of Russia and the United States?
2. What conditions need to prevail for Russian leaders to feel that their country is secure from external rivals?
3. What is the relative weight of the personal factor and structural realities in the formulation and conduct of Russian foreign policy?
4. How should the United States deal with the increasingly close strategic alignment between Russia and China? How much of a challenge does it pose to the United States?
5. What are the similarities and differences in the U.S. and Russian foreign policy conduct?
6. On what basis has Russia identified external threats throughout its history?
7. How should the United States deal with the increasingly close strategic alignment between Russia and Iran? How much of a challenge does it pose to the United States?

Courses on strategic studies:

1. How has history shaped the strategic thinking of Russia and the United States?
2. What conditions need to prevail for Russian leaders to feel that their country is secure from external rivals?
3. What is the relative weight of the personal factor and structural realities in the formulation and conduct of Russian foreign policy?
4. What is the legacy of Soviet foreign policy strategies?
5. **How have Russia's resources changed its foreign policy capabilities and strategy?**
6. What are the critical choices facing the United States today as it formulates its Russia policy? How should it balance short-term imperatives and long-term ambitions?
7. How should the United States deal with the increasingly close strategic alignment between Russia and China? How much of a challenge does it pose to the United States?

Courses on Russian and Eurasian studies:

1. How has history shaped the strategic thinking of Russia and the United States?
2. How should the United States deal with the increasingly close strategic alignment between Russia and China? How much of a challenge does it pose to the United States?
3. Is Russia a great power? What are the foundations of its power? How durable are they?
4. Where do the states of the former Soviet Union fit into Russia's strategic thinking?
5. What constitutes victory for Russia in its war against Ukraine? What would be the implications of victory for Russia's strategic position in the world?
6. How has Russian rhetoric about external threats and conflicts changed over time? What are the implications of these changes?

Courses on global affairs:

1. How has history shaped the strategic thinking of Russia and the United States?
2. How important are U.S.-Russian relations to global peace and security today? Are they more or less important than they were during the Cold War? How do you explain the difference?
3. What global issues require U.S.-Russian cooperation to be resolved or effectively managed?
4. Is it possible to construct a European security system in cooperation with Russia, or must one be built against Russia?
5. What are the implications of Russia's relative decline for world order?
6. How have Russia's natural resources impacted its place in global affairs?
7. How would the emergence of a multipolar world affect U.S.-Russian relations?

Essay Questions

Courses on international security affairs:

1. What would be the ideal world order from Russia's standpoint? How would Russia relate to other major powers and to its immediate neighbors?
2. Why has Russia played a more active geopolitical role in global affairs than the size of its economy and population would indicate, that is, why has Russia "punched above its weight"?

3. What would a multipolar world look like? How could the United States go about accepting Russia as a global power without compromising its security?

Courses on strategic studies:

1. How important is the US-China-Russia triangle to global peace and security?
2. What is the future of European security? Can it be constructed in cooperation with Russia or must it be built against Russia?

Courses on Russian and Eurasian studies:

1. Why is the former Soviet space of such great importance in Russian strategic thinking?
2. How does Russian President Vladimir Putin compare with earlier Russian/Soviet rulers?

Courses on global affairs:

1. Why did the United States and Russia fail to build the enduring partnership they both aspired to at the end of the Cold War?
2. Can the issue of climate change be compartmentalized to allow the United States and Russia to cooperate in meeting that challenge while they remain opposed on questions of European security, including Ukraine? How?
3. What role will the Arctic play in the future of U.S.-Russia relations?

Supplementary Materials

Timothy Frye, *Weak Strongman: The Limits of Power in Putin's Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022).

Edward L. Keenan, "Muscovite Political Folkways," *Russian Review* 45, no. 2 (April 1986): 115-181.

Robert Legvold, *Return to Cold War* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016).

Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and its Rivals* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).

Andrew Monaghan, *Dealing with the Russians* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019).

M. E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch: American, Russia, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Stalemate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021).

Angela E. Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

[Visit Book Page](#)