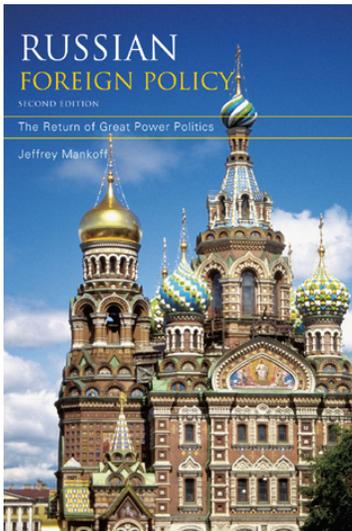


COUNCIL *on* FOREIGN RELATIONS

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Teaching Notes

Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics

2nd edition

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Rowan & Littlefield Publishers

September 2011

\$39.95 paperback

352 pages

ISBN 978-1-4422-0825-4

The Council on Foreign Relations book *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics* analyzes the development of Russia's foreign policy since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. It argues that following a brief period of support for binding Russia to Western institutions, the Russian elite came to adhere to a worldview emphasizing Russia's importance as a major power and pillar of the international order. For this reason, the Kremlin has pursued a foreign policy course designed to maximize Russia's ability to act as a fully sovereign great power—in partnership with the West when possible, and in opposition to the West when necessary. By tracing the development of a broad elite consensus about Russian foreign policy and analyzing in depth Russian policy toward the United States, Europe, China, and the former Soviet states, *Russian Foreign Policy* helps students understand why Russia remains stubbornly defensive of its interests and opposed to the emergence of a Western-dominated world. It also helps students understand why Russia is not an inveterate foe of the United States, even as it insists that Washington respect its interests.

This book, along with the teaching notes, discussion questions, and suggestions for further projects, is ideal for the following types of courses:

- International relations
- Russian politics and foreign policy

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Discussion Questions

Courses on International Relations

1. In what ways is Russia's approach to foreign policy similar to that of other major powers such as the United States or China? In what ways is it different? What accounts for these differences?
2. Why did Russia and the former Soviet satellite states in Eastern Europe adopt different foreign policy strategies following the end of the Cold War? In contrast to Poland, Hungary, and other Eastern European states, why did Russia never seriously consider joining NATO or the European Union?
3. Can a strategy designed to integrate Russia into European institutions succeed? If so, what steps will Europeans (and Americans) have to take for it to work? Can existing institutions be used as a platform for integrating Russia, or will it be necessary to design new economic, political, and security institutions? If the latter, how should these differ from existing institutions?
4. Are Russia and China allies, rivals, or both? What factors have led to the Russo-Chinese rapprochement over the past two decades? Should the West be concerned by the development of closer ties between Moscow and Beijing?
5. How has NATO expansion affected relations between the Western powers and Russia? How has Russia's position on NATO expansion evolved since the 1990s?
6. Describe the long-term impact of the 2008 Russo-Georgian war on the international balance in Europe and the Caucasus. What did Russia gain from the war? What did it lose? Could the West have prevented the war?

Courses on Russian Politics and Foreign Policy

1. How can conflicts in the post-Soviet space be minimized? Should the West accept a greater degree of Russian influence and control over the policies of its neighbors? Should the West reduce its support for countries such as Georgia in order to promote better relations with Moscow?
2. How does Russia define its national interests? What role does ideology play in Russian foreign policy? Does the structure of Russia's government affect how the country assesses its national interests?
3. Should neighboring countries worry about Russian investment in their economies? Is this investment (especially by state companies) a tool of political influence? If so, what can be done about it?
4. What role do international institutions and international law play in Russia's foreign policy strategy? Why does Moscow prefer some institutions (such as the UN Security Council) to others?
5. Why does Moscow emphasize bilateral relations rather than multilateral frameworks for addressing major security challenges?
6. What role does power play in Russian foreign policy strategy? What does power mean in the Russian context? What steps has the Kremlin taken to amass power and what challenges does it face?

Further Projects

Debate

Divide students into small teams and organize a debate on some of the central dilemmas affecting policy toward Russia, such as:

- Should NATO continue to expand?
- Does Russia have a legitimate right to a "sphere of privileged interests" in the former Soviet Union?
- Should the West prioritize its support for elected governments in Georgia and Ukraine or its relations with Russia?
- Should the United States and Europe support a new security architecture that includes Russia?
- Should strategic arms control remain central to the U.S. strategy for engaging Russia?
- Is Russia a status quo power or a revisionist power?

Memorandum for the President

Assign students to write a memorandum to the president outlining steps the United States can take to “reset” relations with Moscow. The memo should make a case for why resetting relations is in the U.S. national interest and lay out specific steps that can be taken. It should also highlight potential obstacles, anticipate Russia’s response to specific policy recommendations, and provide recommendations in the event that the preferred strategy fails.

Op-ed

Have students write a newspaper op-ed (600–800 words) advocating for or against one of the following policies:

- Georgian NATO membership
- Russia’s admission to the World Trade Organization
- The signing of a new European security treaty including Russia
- The construction of an anti-ballistic missile system in Eastern Europe

The op-ed should be addressed to the U.S. government, but accessible to a general reader.

Supplementary Materials

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