

Ashot Manucharyan: Books from Russia / Russia's Foreign Policy

Between 2005 and 2007, some interesting works on the country's foreign policy under Mr Putin's presidency were published in Russia. However, critical analyses of Mr Putin's foreign-policy decisions are rare.

For fifteen years now, people in Russia have agonised over the question of how the USSR, once a feared and respected superpower, could disintegrate. According to Soviet prime minister Nikolai Ryzhkov, the USA have consistently been following their political goal of destroying the Soviet Union since 1945. Mr Ryzhkov sticks to his conviction that the most important cause of the disintegration of his country is the conspiracy of the West rather than the ramshackle communist economic system.

It was none other than Egor Gaidar, a former columnist of the theoretical organ 'Kommunist' and ex-prime minister of Russia, who disclosed the true background of the collapse of the Soviet empire in his latest great book. Mr Gaidar critically analyses Russia's current state propaganda which similarly glorifies the 'good old Soviet times'. He wipes the slate clean: It was neither the USA, nor NATO, nor the CIA that brought the Soviet Union to its knees. Rather, it was the Soviet political and economic system which ran down the former superpower, bringing it to the verge of starvation. Making use of archived documents that were inaccessible before, Mr Gaidar provides evidence of the full extent of the economic crisis and of the CPSU's fear of strikes. The Soviet Union's need of foreign currency for buying food became more and more urgent: The nuclear power was threatened by famine. The collapse of the nominal superpower was delayed only by Western 'political loans' to Mr Gorbachev which ultimately led to eastern Europe's liberation from communism and Germany's reunification.

Alexander Kolesnikov, renowned journalist and Kremlin correspondent for the well-known Russian newspaper 'Kommersant', has written an excellently worded Putin trilogy about the doings of Russia's saviour. Those books explain how Mr Putin, a rather reserved person by nature, became one of the country's most popular politicians – a politician whose support of the weaker segments of the population that have to defend themselves against predatory capitalism appears authentic. Mr Kolesnikov's witty and intelligent reports about president Putin and his policy rank among the few objective representations in the otherwise vociferous choir of cliques guided by the Kremlin's propaganda whose task it is to make the image of the 'flawless democrat' shine ever more brightly.

The standard work on international policy produced by some well-known Russian authors of the MGIMO University demonstrates that even political scientists and analysts who are close to the Kremlin are hardly aware of the true objectives of Mr Putin's foreign and security policy. There are only a few exceptional cases in which they succeeded in predicting changes of direction in Mr Putin's foreign policy. A. Tolkunov emphasises that it is thanks to a pragmatic foreign-policy strategy that Russia's relations with the USA are moving out of their dead end again. According to him, the fact that Russia is no longer arguing with the USA about the termination of the ABM Treaty is a sign of rationality on the part of Moscow's political leadership. However, Mr Tolkunov could not know in 2005 that only two years later, the dispute about US anti-missile systems in eastern Europe would cause the Russian-American conflict to flare up again.

Nor could V. Nikonov, a well-known political scientist, foresee that questions of strategic balance would play an important role in Mr Putin's security policy. Two years ago, Mr Nikonov argued that Russia was taking 'a softer view on questions of arms control and the enlargement of NATO', having in fact departed from the once-sacrosanct principle of strategic parity. In his

opinion, president Putin is pursuing a matter-of-fact policy which makes use of existing resources, and 'integrationism' is the true 'Putin doctrine'. Sergei Rogov emphasises the importance of good relations between Russia and the USA, calling on his country to launch domestic and economic reforms. According to him, the only way for Russia to do its homework is via integration, whereas a confrontation with the USA or a policy of isolationism would have negative consequences for Russia, not for the USA.

Professor Andrei Kokoshin favours an aggressive foreign and security policy vis-à-vis the USA and NATO, not least because of his disappointment with American politics. He argues that Washington has ignored Russian interests again and again, one of the reasons for Moscow to change its course in foreign policy. With regard to the USA's nuclear strategy, Mr Kokoshin proposes a strategy of 'asymmetric response'. At the same time, he advocates a reserved Russian response to the policy of the Pentagon, saying that Russia must not 'overreact' under any circumstances, as this is exactly what the Washington hawks are expecting.

Dmitri Trenin, retired lieutenant colonel and director of the Expert Council of the Carnegie Center in Moscow, is one of the internationally best known Russian authors. With his current ingenious study, Mr Trenin is setting standards for analysing politics and science in Russia. First of all, the author calls on his homeland to become a 'Western country'. The question is not whether Russia will become part of the West but how quickly modern democratic institutions and technologies will strike roots. Mr Trenin feels certain that Russia will fail and become a victim of globalisation if it does not adopt this course.

Contrary to the opinion propagated by the Kremlin, Mikhail Delyagin is convinced that Vladimir Putin's policy of 'constructive isolationism' vis-à-vis the West is not successful. Rather, he regards it as the expression of an inferiority complex of the 'power oligarchy' whose foreign policy is defined solely by a primitive anti-Western attitude. Another interesting aspect is that the author contradicts the official propaganda in one important point: As a result of Mr Putin's security policy, he argues, Russia is even weaker today than under president Yeltsin. Furthermore, Mr Delyagin believes it is critical that Russia's foreign policy solely depends on the intellect of one man, president Putin.

Andrei Zagorski, a scientist from Moscow, produced an outstanding work about the formation and development of the CSCE / OSCE. Never before has there been such a comprehensive study on the activities of this organisation, neither in Russia nor in the West. Mr Zagorski clears away numerous myths and stereotypes regarding the origins of the CSCE that are common in Western and Soviet-Russian historiography. The book's relevance increased sharply when president Putin cancelled one of the most important elements of the Helsinki Process: The CFE Treaty about conventional armed forces in Europe, a move that greatly affected the mutual trust which, helped by the CFE Treaty, has been growing ever since the mid-seventies.

Especially authors who concentrate on Russia's security policy criticise the CFE Treaty, regarding it as the first defeat suffered by the Russian Federation even prior to its independence. As an insider, Viktor Starodubov, a retired lieutenant general, describes the process of nuclear disarmament and the negotiations about retaining the ABM Treaty in two informative volumes. Mr Starodubov welcomes Mr Putin's negative attitude towards US anti-missile systems in eastern Europe. Moreover, he points out that in the future, the USA will have to reckon with the strategic potential not only of Russia but also of China. Against this background, Mr Starodubov advises president Putin to not get involved in further nuclear-disarmament agreements with the USA.

During the last three years, some dozens of books appeared that address the international aspects of the disintegration of the superpower. One of them is a study by Professor Anatoly Utkin on the political failure of Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin and the calamities resulting from it for Russia, including the USA's rise to dominance in a monopolar world as well as the demographic situation of dramatically declining birthrates in his homeland. Against this background, Mr Utkin fears that Siberia could be lost sometime between 2030 and 2040 as hardly any ethnic Russians would be living there by then.

By now, it is common in Russia for high-ranking officials or scientists to publish the results of their studies in books. It is thanks to this circumstance that a top-class book on Russia's policy in the CIS written by Alexander Mikhailenko is available now. In it, Mr Mikhailenko declares that integration processes have slowed down considerably in the CIS. Against this background, he suggests two cogitable scenarios: In a first model, the CIS is dissolved, enabling Russia to initiate a new policy in the post-Soviet territory. In a second model, the CIS is made more efficient, guided by the example of the European Union.

Professor Sergei Lusyanin, chairman of the Oriental Research Foundation, drafted an excellent analysis of president Putin's eastern policy during his second term of office (2004 to 2008), taking into account not only necessary facts but also critical voices. Moreover, Mr Lusyanin dedicates much space to the Kremlin's policy vis-à-vis China. Having persistently refused Beijing's wish for the construction of a gas pipeline from Siberia to China before 2006, president Putin unexpectedly changed his mind during his state visit in March of that year: He assured the delighted Chinese that two pipelines would be built, one towards the west (Europe) and another towards the east (China). To Western-oriented Russian energy strategists, this statement was a slap in the face, as they favoured not only economic profit but also political rapprochement with the West. At the same time, they realised the enormous risks involved: There is no adequate infrastructure for building a pipeline in Siberia, so that the project might end in an economic disaster like that of the famous Baikal-Amur Magistral (BAM) railway line. However, Lusyanin emphasises that the chances for the eastern pipeline are likely to rise as, according to him, vice prime minister Dmitri Medvedev is the most important protagonist of Russia's rapprochement with China.

Kamaluddin Gadshiev daringly takes a look at the future world order and Russia's place in it. This scientist from Moscow declines discussing the question of whether Russia is a 'regional' or a 'great power'. In his opinion, Russia is unique and it would not be wise to classify the country as being more oriented towards the west or the east. According to him, Russia has other problems: Parts of the modernisation process are still missing. Moreover, a civil society and a constitutional state will have to be created. This being so, the author arrives at the conclusion that the danger his home country is facing comes from within, being caused by unsolved economic, social, ethnic, and religious problems.

In addition, Russian geopolitics is influenced by authors richly adorned with academic titles, whose pseudo-scientific approaches, however, are confined to the foreign and security-policy structures at the beginning of the 20th century.

All great Russian writers have always been highly political. In his brilliant satirical novel, *Day of the Oprichnik*, Vladimir Sorokin carries the always relevant political dispute between the Western-oriented and the Slavophile camp to extremes. Next to Mr Sorokin's masterpiece, two other true gems of Soviet-Russian literature appeared in German in 2007. In *Pushkin House*, Andrei Bitov describes the state of literature and the Soviet society after Stalin's death. The second novel, *Life and Fate*, a legendary masterpiece about Stalingrad written by Vasili

Grossman, deals with the Soviet system and the struggle for survival in the war. Vladimir Sorokin, Andrei Bitov, and Vasili Grossman represent three generations of Russian novelists, who had a crucial influence on the cultural condition of today's Russia.