

## REVIEW



### RUSSIA IN THE SYSTEM OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: A NEW PERSPECTIVE

Tsvetkova, N., ed., 2017. *Understanding International Relations: Russia and the World*. Rowman and Littlefield.

The shifts in the system of international relations, Russia's new foreign policy, disappointment with globalisation, growing nationalism, and the effects that digital technology has on politics — all these factors impose new requirements on international relations studies. It is no secret that the European and US schools of thought used to dominate the field. In the 1990s—2000s, globalisation and neo-liberalism created the background for Russia's new role in the international arena. The country's financial system, economy, politics, culture, and education became integrated into the system of international relations and open to all the countries of the world. However, Russia's position and the opinions of Russian politicians and experts on certain aspects of world politics were disregarded and ignored by both the international political establishment and the specialists in international relations. Of course, Russia and the views of Russian scholars were visible in the research discourse but they never came to the fore. On the other hand, Russian scientists often complain that their studies are not accepted by the international journals and publishing house because of the lack of a pro-western and anti-Russian sentiment.

International relations experts from Saint Petersburg State University set out to correct the imbalance between the actual role of Russia in the world politics and the limited visibility of Russian expertise in the international research discourse on international relations and to demonstrate that the views of Russian scholars on the most urgent political problems deserve publication abroad. To this end, they prepared a multi-authored monograph in the English language, aimed at both authoritative researchers and postgraduate students who have just trodden the path of research into international relations and other social sciences. The ongoing discussion between Russian and international experts on the interpretation of the current global problems necessitated this monograph. There is an urgent need to familiarise the international community with the essence of Russian foreign policy and the approaches to international relations developed by the Russian scientists.

The authors of the monograph employed very innovative approaches.

Firstly, the authors managed to overcome the usual drawback of similar works where the examination of international relations takes priority over Russian studies proper or the analysis of Russia dominates over the

study of world politics. The monograph managed to show the role and place of Russia in the system of international relations and to reveal the Russian interpretation of the current events and of international relations theories. This book is not about Russia but rather about the system of international relations and the role of Russia in solving the problems in the international arena. The authors move from the general to the particular — from a theoretical perspective on international relations to Russia as part of world politics. Each chapter presents different takes on the problem, describes various concepts that can be used in analysing it, and contains numerous case studies. All this provides a solid framework for understanding Russia and the current international relations system.

Secondly, the publication of such a monograph in the English language is still a novelty for Russian science. The fact that the book saw the light testifies to the considerable expertise of the authors who managed to explain the most acute Russia-related problems to the foreign reader. Many of these problems (for example, that of unrecognised states) were first formulated and analysed from a research perspective in this monograph. Such publications remain a rarity outside Russia. However, this publication proves that the Russian research discourse is not in isolation. Today, the journals of high-ranking outlets discuss the most diverse points of view.

Thirdly, the authors of the monograph managed to provide an objective view of Russia's foreign policy and internal development. On the one hand, the experts refrained from the criticism of Russia, which is often expressed by the researchers who publish their monographs in Europe or the US. On the other hand, they do not ignore the weakness of Russia's position on international affairs. The monograph offers a balanced analysis of Russian politics and presents diverse points of view.

The book consists of three parts. Part one is dedicated to the analysis of various theories, concepts, and models of international relations. It examines the methods for studying world politics and narrates the history of the current system of international relations. The Russian experts on the history, theory, and methodology of international relations interpret the views of the traditional schools of thought and demonstrate what methods of world politics and regional studies are the most popular in Russia. They offer an original perspective on the system of international relations from the perspective of the geographical, economic, and political standing of the Russian Empire, the USSR and today's Russia throughout world history.

Part two focuses on the current problems and challenges of world politics. It addresses such issues as international political economy, international conflicts and their resolution, non-proliferation, unrecognised states, international organisations, environmental policy, soft power, and public diplomacy. Political economy opens this part of the monograph. In my opinion, this is a fortunate and innovative way to approach the development of world politics. Usually, the analysis of various aspects of in-

ternational relation starts with the consideration of individual countries, regions, and crises. In this case, the Russian researchers start with the economic and commercial ties among the states — the ties that make our world global and connected despite the political problems, the system of sanctions, or the severance of diplomatic relations.

The popular topic of conflicts receives a thorough accounting in this part. The authors address the essence and methods of conflict management. A novelty topic is the factor of unrecognised states and its effect on world politics. This is one of the most sensitive issues in international relations studies. Usually, the discussion on unrecognised states is reduced to the official positions of the leading states. The authors managed to expand this topic and create a typology of unrecognised states.

Non-proliferation also receives an original interpretation in this monograph. The authors not only list the treaties and conferences dedicated to this topic but also identify the factors in the bilateral relations that either contribute to or subvert the non-proliferation regime.

In analysing such traditional topics as the role of international organisations in world politics, environmental policy, and soft power, the authors place emphasis on the most acute problems and analyse the Russian position. The international organisations are examined from the perspective of their actual role in world politics and economy. The monograph not only focuses on such major organisations as the UN or the OSCE but also presents a thorough analysis of the effect of regional organisations on the global system.

Environmental policy is also tackled from a new point of view. Political bias, ideology, and money combine when it comes to environmental protection, which might seem at first to be very loosely related to politics. The authors analyse various conceptual political and even party-specific approaches to these problems across the globe. The soft power and public diplomacy of such leading states as the US, Russia, Iran, China, France, Germany, and others are analysed in the final chapter. The authors identify their strengths and weaknesses while managing (which is rarely the case) to avoid exaggerating the role of soft power in world politics. Each chapter is a combination of different conceptual and discursive frameworks. This provides the reader with a balanced and multi-faceted perspective on various problems of international relations.

Part three addresses the key aspects of Russia's foreign and domestic policy. An analysis of the evolution of today's Russia, its economic development, its Eurasian and Arctic policies, and its relations with Europe and the US gives a comprehensive picture of the current functioning of world politics. The problems of Russia's political and economic development and its trade imbalance are considered in the first two chapters. The authors do not avoid the contentious issues relating to the building of the new centralised state in Russia. However, the key to understanding Russia's current foreign and domestic policy is the chapters on national security, military strategy, and Russia's policy towards Eurasia and the Arctic.



The authors make the first attempt in the literature to demonstrate the connection between Russia's internal development and its standing in Eurasia and the Arctic. The monograph presents the perspectives of the Russian government and experts and compares them to the views of the leading international powers. Finally, Russia's bilateral relations with Europe, on the one hand, and the US, on the other, conclude both part three and the book. Here, the authors also employ an innovative approach. Placing the chapters on bilateral relations at the end of the monograph stresses both the weakening effect of these ties on the international relations systems and the importance of Russia's relations with the EU and the US. This logic is used to show in which parts of the global system Russia should look for partners in solving the most serious global problems. The authors identify the levels of and pressure points in Russia's relations with both Europe and the US. Special attention is paid to the weaknesses of the US, EU, and Russian policies.

However, just as any work, this monograph has its own shortcomings. I think that a separate chapter on the relations between Russia and China was warranted. These bilateral relations are addressed in the chapters on Russia's Eurasian policy and in the context of Russian-US relations.

Nevertheless, this multi-authored monograph prepared by the Russian researchers who studied and worked at various universities in the US, Europe, and the Asian-Pacific Region builds up a comprehensive picture of how the system of international relations develops. The book also demonstrates the significance of Russia for world politics and addresses the country's internal development.

This book can be used as a textbook for postgraduate students and it will benefit a wide range of specialists in Russian studies, international relations, and political science.

The publication of this monograph testifies to the considerable expertise of the Russian researchers and their close associations with the global academic community. This association is a result of studying abroad and participating in international conferences. All this makes it possible for the Russian experts to discuss the most acute problems in the pages of the works published in the US and Europe. It would be a mistake to say that the position of the Russian party is not available to the international audience or that the opinions of Russian researchers are not taken into account by the international press, journals, and publishing houses. The high quality of research is a fast track to the publication of the Russian expert opinions abroad.

The author

*Dr Yury S. Kuzmin*, School of International Relations, St. Petersburg State University, Russia.

E-mail: [kuzminyu@mail.ru](mailto:kuzminyu@mail.ru)