

BUGAJSKI, Janusz, ASSENOVA, Margarita. *Eurasian Disunion. Russia's Vulnerable Flanks*. The Jamestown Foundation, 2016. ISBN 978-0-9855045-5-7.

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Eurasian Disunion: Russia's Vulnerable Flanks

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The geopolitical approach to the analysis of Russian foreign policy is not new nor particularly groundbreaking; however, it is an important part of understanding the Russian state and its actions. Six years since the publication of the book, the themes explored in it are still relevant. The intertwined political and economic systems of Russia produce new unpredictable outcomes with the same constant – Vladimir Putin is still the Russian President, and the people surrounding him are still able to cling to power in Russia.

Janusz Bugajski and Margarita Assenova successfully manage to reasonably and apolitically describe the very real Russian geopolitical concerns and fears that play out in the background of seemingly irrational and even aggressive Russian foreign policy. The authors do a great job of separating Russian society and the Russian state, with specific focus on Putin and his entourage and the Kremlin's regime. They spotlight a Putinist understanding of the world around Russia which is seen strictly in hostile realist geopolitical terms.

The authors propose that current Russian foreign policy is based on the vague revisionist notion of returning to former imperial glory, whether the time of the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union. To prove it, they analyse the relationship of Russia with various regions of influence surrounding the state. The theme of the 'Russian world' present throughout the text is highlighted in Russia's relationship with the former USSR states. Their economic and security dependency on Russia is one of the main pillars of relative Russian success, the

other one being the lack of political will of the West to oppose the autocratic regime in Russia.

The thorough analysis of every *flank* is provided from multiple perspectives – every tension (social, economic, nationalist, etc.) is explored in detail and helps the reader fathom what is happening. A new iteration of the book, if it comes out, should best separate the Arctic region as its own vulnerable flank, as the involvement of other greater powers such as China and the US is much more apparent there than in any other geopolitical region surrounding Russia. Currently, it was only briefly mentioned in relation to the Northern flank but not included as its own vulnerable flank.

One of the biggest strengths of the book already mentioned in the introduction is the comprehensive itinerary of tools and tactics used by the Kremlin to solidify its power. The list consists of over 60 methods conveniently broken down into eight categories (international, informational, ideological, economic, ethnic, political, social and military) and could be very useful for other researchers interested in analysing political actions of the Kremlin.

On the other hand, the list of policy proposals in the conclusion of the book seems rather aggressive and one-sided. Even though the authors clearly state their focus on Putin's regime, they have not included the efforts of Russian civil society and other political actors opposing the Kremlin from the inside. With hindsight, we can see Putin's (and not just the Kremlin's) ability to withstand the pressure from the West, but the opposition is much more significant if it comes from within. After the controversial election results and the imprisonment of Alexey Navalny in 2021, the protest broke out around Russia but were provoked more by the apparent vote manipulation and corruption, and less so by the economic realities of Putin's regime as argued in the book.

Nevertheless, *Eurasian Disunion: Russia's Vulnerable Flanks* is an essential reading for anyone interested in Russian foreign policy as it conceptualises and scrutinises the geopolitical and geoeconomic interests of the Russian state and gets into the mind of the Kremlin elites.