



# Executive Summary

Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press



## POLITICS AND ECONOMICS IN PUTIN'S RUSSIA

**Stephen J. Blank**  
Editor

The papers collected here offer multiple insights into the political and economic challenges that currently beset Russia, and which the authors agree it is not meeting. Ultimately, these challenges—whether they be the failure to progress technologically on a par with Russia's needs, or to overcome backwardness in the defense industry, or to overcome the crippling legacy of patrimonial rule in politics and economics—constitute security challenges that will encompass Russia and all its interlocutors. These papers, all of which (except the Introduction) were presented at the Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College annual 2012 conference on Russia, duly focus on the domestic foundations of Russian security. As we know from innumerable other cases, security begins at home, and this is no less the case for Russia.

Steven Rosefielde and Stefan Hedlund outline the political-economic characteristics of the patrimonial-authoritarian and very traditional Muscovite system that is the reality of governance and government in Russia and find that system to be at the foundation of Russia's chronic problems. Rosefielde, indeed, finds it virtually impossible for this system to reform itself—a finding that, if true, means we will be dealing with a chronically and congenitally insecure, unstable Russia. Meanwhile, both of these papers also uncover many of the economic pathologies that are the logical and natural outcome of this neo-medieval system. In that context, one of the abiding problems of the historic Russian state in all of its various mani-

festations is enduring technological backwardness and inferiority relative to all or most of its interlocutors. That problem continues today and is, of course, a major cause for Russia's enduring economic-military weakness relative to the United States, and now China. Harley Balzer's paper goes into great detail uncovering the social and cognitive structures, as well as the enduring political factors that make for this lasting backwardness and contribute to the abiding security dilemmas of this system.

Turning to the foreign policy side, Janusz Bugajski outlines Russia's efforts to represent itself as a pole of an existing or emerging multipolar order, the two concepts often eliding one into the other in Putin's Russia. Russia also is duly trying to use that status as a lever by which to organize around itself a major continental bloc or integrate its neighbors into a satellite and subordinate position around it. These efforts, too, are historic in origin, as the Russian state has never been anything but an empire, and its leaders, including the present generation, have never conceived or been able to conceive the state in any other way. Clearly, this effort also undermines not only Russia's internal security by placing huge burdens upon it, but Russian policy also makes the neighboring areas surrounding Russia inherently unstable. As a result, we are dealing, as Stephen Blank observes, with an inherently problematic and unstable major state with large but insufficient military power and a history of state collapse to "imperial overstretch." In his introduction, Blank warns that the

U.S. Army must think harder about the possibility of such a crisis, as well as the other issues it now confronts. The Army must do so now, rather than later or not at all; otherwise, when the collapse comes, as he argues, it inevitably will generate pressures for a military response somewhere along the peripheries of Russia's state borders. Then it will be too late to think in a strategic and coherent way about these issues rather than in the usual stovepiped and over-rushed, if not inefficient, way we generally approach crises for which we are not prepared. These essays therefore serve as a kind of early warning to our readers based on the old adage that forewarned is forearmed.

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