

Janusz Bugajski, Dismantling the West: Russia's Atlantic Agenda (Potomac Books, 2009), 256 pp., \$29.95

Nearly twenty-five years ago, Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote what he called “a practical guide to action” framing a grand strategy for the United States in its competition with the Soviet Union. Viewing the U.S.S.R. as the Great Russian Empire in Marxist-Leninist garb, Brzezinski argued that control of the Eurasian landmass constituted the prize in this rivalry.¹ Recently, Janusz Bugajski of the Center for Strategic and International Studies has issued a similar call (with practical recommendations) to the West to resist a resurgent Russian imperialism threatening to “Finlandize” Europe.

Russia's strategic goal, Bugajski maintains, is to roll back U.S. global predominance by transforming a unipolar into a multipolar world, where Russia exerts greater influence. To this end it seeks to draw Europe into its sphere of influence and to undermine the Atlantic Alliance by attenuating Europe's ties to America and isolating Britain. The EU is the prime target of Moscow's aggressive strategy, which uses the energy entrapment of Europe as its principal tool.

Vladimir Putin, who lamented the collapse of the Soviet Union as the greatest political catastrophe of the twentieth century, revived the anti-Western, Czarist strategy of expanding a Eurasian zone dominated by Russia. Putin rebuilt the power of the central government, creating an “authoritarian statism” run by a narrow clique of security officials fusing their political/imperial ambitions and economic interests. The EU, Russia's main business partner, occupies the central front of the strategic battle. Moscow employs a “divide and rule” stratagem, using the “soft power” of economic and energy ties to neutralize the larger states. France, Germany, and Italy, eager to appease Moscow, are the weak links.

The Kremlin accuses the U.S. of pursuing a policy of “encirclement” by constructing an anti-Russian axis among former Warsaw Pact countries and among former satellites – Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Azerbaijan, and the Central Asian states. Bugajski argues that Russia calibrates “managed instability” toward the U.S., avoiding direct confrontation, and does not consider Moscow a reliable security partner on any issue. Moscow, he claims, exploits the terrorist issue to wage a brutal, anti-independence war against Chechnya and to bolster non-democratic governments on its borders; it manipulates the Iranian/North Korean nuclear standoffs to undermine U.S. interests in the Middle East and East Asia.

For Moscow NATO plays the stalking horse for America's imperium. Putin charges that NATO enlargement, especially Polish and Baltic membership, and the effort to station U.S. missiles and bases in former Soviet satellite states form an imperialist plot to dominate Russia. In response, Moscow cultivates bilateral EU ties to foster anti-Americanism and discredit NATO. It strenuously lobbied German and French leaders to oppose NATO MAPs for Ukraine and Georgia.

NATO's eastern expansion has been the main cause of Russian ire in recent years. The State Department denies it today, but it was widely believed that when the Soviet Union imploded and, remarkably, capitulated on Western terms, Secretary of State James Baker promised Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, 'we will not leap-frog Germany and come up to your borders.' That, however, is precisely what happened. Bugajski guilelessly professes NATO poses no threat to Russian security; it only blocks "Russia's expansionism." Viewed with Kremlin eyes, this plainly means an "anti-Russian" alliance.

Bugajski shows how Russia adroitly utilizes an array of soft power instruments – diplomacy, informational warfare, energy blackmail, trade and investment ties – to gain political leverage over post-Soviet republics and former bloc members, and to persuade Germany, France, and Italy that partnership with Russia, bypassing Brussels and Washington, serves their self-interest.

The author offers a number of recommendations to "revitalize the West" and thwart the Russian imperial menace. Some steps, such as diversifying European energy sources and developing a common energy policy, make sense. Other measures are unrealistic. Europe will not strengthen NATO, which Defense Secretary Gates warns is in danger of becoming a "two-tier alliance," and EU "indigestion" with the previous enlargement of its "voluntary empire" makes further expansion unlikely.²

Other of Bugajski's proposals isolate and provoke Russia. Extending NATO security protection further east would confirm the "encirclement" alleged by Moscow. The author's initiative to offer diplomatic/political support to "all nations within the Russian Federation" (e.g., Chechnya and Ingushetia) desiring independence couldn't be better calculated to inflame Moscow. Americans, who spilled the blood of a million men to crush a secession, shouldn't find it difficult to understand this. For Bugajski the solution to blocking Russia's imperial threat to its neighbors is "to consolidate and enlarge the zone of democratic security."

Russia, observed the Marquis deCustine, is a "conquering community."³ What are the nature and scale of the present Russian threat? "Three very powerful motives," Thucydides explained, - "security, honor, and self-interest" – impel states to war.⁴ Bugajski acknowledges Russia does not want to revive a Cold War; rather, it opportunistically seeks alliances to project its influence over states to undermine U.S. and NATO power. Yet striving to expand influence at the expense of rivals is what great powers have done since time immemorial. Having experienced a humiliating loss of power and prestige after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia, a wounded Bear, is today attempting to reassert its influence in Eurasia and restore its international "greatness." Putin-Medvedev play a bare-knuckled game of traditional power politics. Whether a pacified, flaccid, self-absorbed Europe has the stomach for this fight is dubious. Will Europe, Robert Kagan asks, even "bring a knife to a knife fight?"⁵

Nonetheless, Russia's ambitious project may exceed its tenuous grasp. The global financial crisis of 2008-2009 exposed the shallowness of Russia's energy bonanza and

the systemic weakness of its economy, fraying Putin's "social contract" – cooptation of elites, rising living standards for the population, and the restoration of national "greatness" in return for submission to repression. In 2009, Russia's GDP fell 7.9%, despite holding the world's third-largest international currency reserves, and Russia performed the worst among the Group of 20 leading global economic powers. Putin's renationalization of business has exacerbated the corruption and inefficiency of the public sector. Russia's industrial production declined from 1994-2008. Its workers are nearly seven times less productive than their American counterparts, and industrial exports totaled just \$32 billion in 2008, compared to \$1.4 trillion for "BRIC" colleagues, Brazil, India, and China. Russia's road network hasn't expanded since 2000.⁶ The data reveal a Russia that is little more than a developing country with ballistic missiles.

Russia's economic straits have emboldened members of the elite to voice dissatisfaction, and thousands of angry citizens have staged public demonstrations protesting the economic slump in dozens of cities and towns across 11 time zones.⁷ Moreover, Russia confronts a virulent Islamic insurgency centered in the North Caucasus area. Insurgents have staged numerous attacks and bombings, including the dramatic suicide bombings in March of Moscow's subway system at the Lubyanka station, steps away from FSB headquarters. Doku Umarov, an insurgent leader who calls for an Islamic emirate in the Caucasus, threatened further strikes at Russian cities, bringing the bloodshed home to the public. "Blood will no longer be limited to our cities and towns," he declared on an extremist Web site. "The war is coming to their cities."⁸

Most ominously, Russia is caught in the throes of demographic suicide. Demographer Nicholas Eberstadt has documented Russia's unstoppable depopulation due to a "death crisis" among working-age men and women, a trend that continued unabated during the prosperous decade 1998-2007. Declining fertility and the avoidance of marriage and family, primitive healthcare, rising CVD mortality, an AIDS epidemic, and death from injury, violence, and alcohol abuse and poisoning portend a grave social crisis. In 2005, Russia had an estimated population of about 143 million. UN projections for the year 2030 range from 115 to 133 million. The Census Bureau predicts a Russian population of 124 million in 2030.⁹ Demography is destiny. A demographic catastrophe of this magnitude would be historically unprecedented.

In view of these considerations, Bugajski's assessment of the Russian threat and how to counter it seem overstated and counterproductive. In a speech at the Carnegie Endowment in Brussels, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen argued that "NATO-Russia cooperation is not a matter of choice – it is a matter of necessity"¹⁰ Rasmussen outlined a set of cooperative areas aimed at making Russia a "stakeholder in European and international security." It is not necessary for Russia and the West to share the same values and goals; practical collaboration on common interests is sufficient. That, after all, is how we deal with China and many other nations. At the recent Washington nuclear summit, Ukraine's President Viktor Yanukovich set forth a prudent middle course to position Ukraine between Russia and NATO powers, outside both the Western Alliance and Russia's sphere of influence. "The policy of the new administration of Ukraine is to strike the right balance in our relations with Russia and

the European Union,” he said. “We want to be a reliable bridge between Europe and Russia.”¹¹ That means, in part, shelving Ukraine’s previous request for NATO membership. The Ukrainian people oppose this, Yanukovich stated. “We will keep developing partnership interests,” he added. Pragmatically playing the cards you’re dealt is the beginning of statecraft.

Notes

1. Zbigniew Brzezinski, Game Plan: How to Conduct the U.S.-Soviet Contest, (Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986).
2. Robert Kagan, The Return of History and the End of Dreams, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), p. 21.
3. Marquis deCustine, Empire of the Czar: A Journey Through Eternal Russia, foreward by Daniel J. Boorstin (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), p. 616.
4. Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, trans. Rex Warner (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1954), Bk. I, p. 55.
5. Kagan, p. 23.
6. Anders Aslund, "The End Seems Near for the Putin Model," Washington Post, 2/26/10, A25; David Ignatius, "A Russian Economy in Reverse Gear," Washington Post, 7/12/09, A17; Arkady Ostrovsky, "Reversal of Fortune," Foreign Policy (March/April, 2009), pp. 70-74.
7. Philip Pan, "Thousands in Russia Protest Government in a 'Day of Wrath'," Washington Post, 3/21/10, A12; Denis Pinchuk, "Thousands Protest Against Putin in Russian City," Washington Post, 3/28/10.
8. Quoted in Greg Miller and Peter Finn, "Suicide Bombers Hit Station Next to Russia's Top Security Agency," Washington Post, 3/30/10, A15; see also Shamsudin Bokov, "Russia: Bomber Kills 2, Islamich Insurgency Spreads," Washington Post, 4/5/10.
9. Nicholas Eberstadt, "Drunken Nation: Russia's Depopulation Bomb," World Affairs, 171(Spring, 2009), pp. 51-62.
10. "NATO and Russia: A New Beginning," speech by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, Carnegie Endowment, Brussels, 9/18/09; see also Michael Mandelbaum, "Modest Expectations: Facing Up to Our Russia Options," The American Interest (May/June, 2009), pp. 50-57.
11. Quoted in Jackson Diehl, "Ukraine's New President the Highlight of Obama's Nuclear Summit," Washington Post, 4/14/10.