

RENZ, Bettina. *Russia's Military Revival*. Polity Press, 2018. ISBN 978-1-5095-1618-6.

Russia's Military Revival

Reviewed by Ilya Levine

In 2012, US President Barack Obama and his supporters mocked Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney for describing Russia as America's 'number one geopolitical foe'. In 2017, Obama's Vice President Joe Biden characterised Russia as the biggest threat to the international liberal order. While this dramatic reversal was partly a result of the 2016 presidential election, it is also directly connected to Russia's military interventions in Ukraine and Syria. This showed a revamped Russian military as well as a willingness to use this military in ways not seen since the end of the Cold War. On the other hand, some commentators like the University of Chicago's John Mearsheimer argue that Russia's behaviour is still essentially defensive. *Russia's Military Revival* by Bettina Renz, a Russia specialist at the University of Nottingham, makes important contributions to the debate about the threats posed by Russia's partially modernised military.

Taking care to avoid justifying Russia's policies or completely dismissing the concerns of its neighbours, Renz positions herself between Mearsheimer's apologia and those who regard Russia as an existential threat. She challenges three influential arguments: 'first, the view that the desire for a powerful military and its use signals a "paradigm shift" in the Kremlin's outlook; second, the idea that the reason the military revival is pursued necessarily is to enable an expansionist and aggres-

sive foreign policy; and third, the notion that Russian military capabilities now rival those of the West' (p.11).

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In Chapter 1: Russian foreign policy and military power, Renz argues that Moscow sees military power as much more than just a tool of conquest. A powerful military is meant to help Russia to regain its status as a great power, protect its sovereignty, assert its influence over the post-Soviet sphere, and even facilitate multilateral cooperation with other great powers. Chapter 2: Reforming the military describes the decline of the Russian military during the 1990s. While discussions of military modernization began as early as 1992, political and financial factors prevented these from coming to fruition until 2008. Although Vladimir Putin's ambitious modernization program achieved a great deal, Renz argues that Russia's military power is still far behind that of the West because of its heavy reliance on conscripts, manpower problems, technological backwardness, and financial constraints.

While Russia's military strength is far from comparable with the collective forces of the NATO allies, Renz may still have overstated her point. For example, she notes that 'Russia's military expenditure of just over US\$90 billion in 2015 was less than a sixth of US spending, which amounted to over US\$595 billion' (p.72). However, Kennan Institute fellow Michael Kofman and the University of Birmingham's Richard Connolly point out that Russia's military budget may actually be closer to one fourth of that of the US if it is measured in purchasing power parity terms. Analysts have also warned that Russia's investments in missiles, radars, and electronic warfare systems could pose a substantial challenge to US forces.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the country's sizable paramilitary forces. This chapter emphasises the domestic role of the Russian armed forces, particularly in maintaining order and regime security. In Chapter 4: Russian uses of military power since 1991, Renz observes that, while recent years have seen Russia become more assertive, its willingness to deploy its forces beyond its borders can be traced as far back as its interventions in Moldova, Georgia, and Tajikistan in the early 1990s. She argues that the Russian Federation's uses of military power both during and after the 1990s were motivated by a complex combination of status concerns, strategic and material interests, and insecurity. Chapter 5 discusses developments in Russian military thinking and doctrine. Renz challenges some of the popular rhetoric around Russia's use of 'hybrid warfare'. She points out that this ap-

proach is not a Russian invention, fails to adequately describe much of what Russia has done, and has only proven effective under very particular circumstances.

Overall, I would recommend Russia's Military Revival to graduate students, academics, analysts, and policymakers as a nuanced and well-researched introduction to this important topic.

*Book
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