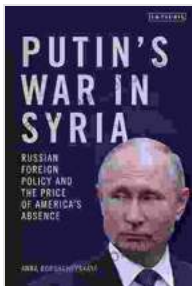


Russia Flexes Its Muscles: Understanding Russian Foreign Policy and the Perils of America's Absence

In the wake of the Cold War's demise, Russia stumbled through a tumultuous period of transition, its economy in shambles and its geopolitical clout diminished. However, under the iron-fisted rule of President Vladimir Putin, Russia has undergone a remarkable resurgence, reasserting itself as a formidable player on the world stage.

Putin's strategic vision for Russia is rooted in a deep-seated belief in Russian exceptionalism and a desire to restore its lost glory. He has orchestrated a systematic campaign to rebuild the country's military, bolster its economy, and reclaim its rightful place among the world's great powers.

Russia's resurgence has been accompanied by a more assertive and expansionist foreign policy, as the Kremlin seeks to expand its sphere of influence and project power beyond its borders. Putin's approach has been characterized by a deft combination of hard and soft power tactics, including:



Putin's War in Syria: Russian Foreign Policy and the Price of America's Absence by Anna Borshchevskaya

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- **Military muscle-flexing:** Russia has invested heavily in upgrading its military capabilities, boasting a formidable arsenal of nuclear weapons, advanced air defense systems, and modernized ground forces. Moscow has employed this military might to coerce and intimidate its neighbors, such as in the annexation of Crimea and its intervention in the Syrian civil war.
- **Energy diplomacy:** Russia is a major supplier of oil and natural gas, giving it a powerful tool for economic statecraft. The Kremlin has used its energy exports to reward allies, punish adversaries, and gain leverage in international negotiations.
- **Cyber warfare:** Russia has emerged as a leading player in the realm of cyber warfare, employing sophisticated techniques to disrupt and manipulate its opponents. The Kremlin has used cyberattacks to target critical infrastructure, influence elections, and spread disinformation.
- **Covert operations:** Russia has a long history of using covert operations to advance its geopolitical interests. Intelligence agencies, such as the GRU and FSB, have been involved in assassinations, espionage, and political meddling.

Russia's foreign policy is guided by a set of strategic goals that reflect Putin's imperial ambitions. These goals include:

- **Recreating a sphere of influence in the former Soviet Union:** Putin seeks to reassert Russian control over its former satellites, particularly

in Ukraine and other post-Soviet states.

- **Weakening NATO and the European Union:** Russia views NATO and the EU as threats to its security and influence. The Kremlin works to undermine these Western institutions and sow discord among their member states.
- **Expanding dominance in the Arctic:** Russia sees the Arctic as a resource-rich region with strategic importance. It is actively expanding its military presence in the Arctic and asserting its territorial claims.
- **Challenging American hegemony:** Putin sees the United States as Russia's primary adversary and seeks to diminish its global influence. Russia has supported anti-American regimes, intervened in conflicts where US interests are at stake, and engaged in nuclear brinkmanship to assert its status as a superpower.

The United States, once the undisputed global hegemon, has seen its influence wane in recent years. This has been due to a combination of factors, including economic challenges, domestic political divisions, and a perceived decline in military dominance.

Russia has deftly exploited America's absence to advance its own geopolitical agenda. The Kremlin has filled the vacuum left by a retreating US presence, particularly in the Middle East and Eastern Europe. This has led to a more assertive Russia, emboldened by the perception that it can act with impunity.

The price of America's absence has been a more unstable and dangerous world. Russia's unchecked aggression poses a threat to international

security and undermines the global Free World established after World War II.

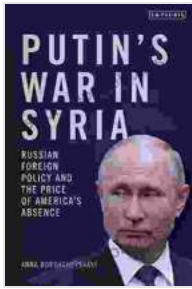
The challenge ahead is to find a way to prevent further escalation between Russia and the West. This will require a concerted effort to rebuild trust and establish a more stable and cooperative relationship.

One essential step is to address Russia's legitimate security concerns. NATO expansion should be handled with sensitivity, and the West should engage with Russia in a constructive dialogue to find mutually acceptable solutions.

At the same time, it is crucial to maintain a strong deterrent against Russian aggression. NATO must bolster its defenses and demonstrate its resolve to defend its members. Additionally, the West should impose meaningful sanctions on Russia for its violations of international law.

The resurgence of Russia as a global power and the waning influence of the United States have created a complex and uncertain geopolitical landscape. Russia's assertive foreign policy poses a significant challenge to the global Free World, and it is imperative that the West finds ways to prevent further escalation.

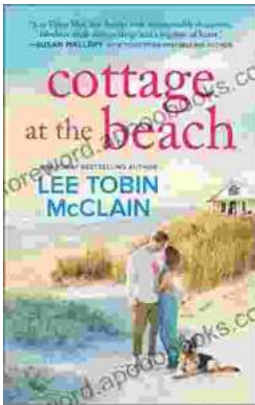
A balanced approach is required, combining diplomacy and deterrence. The West must address Russia's security concerns while maintaining a strong deterrent against aggression. By working together, the international community can prevent further conflict and create a more stable and peaceful world.



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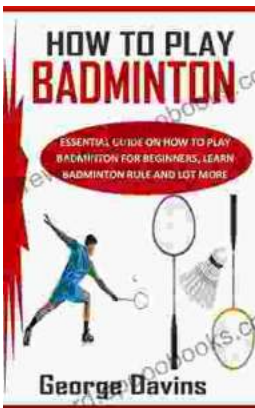
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