

Mark Galeotti, **Putin's Wars: From Chechnya to Ukraine**. Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2022. 384 pages. ISBN 978-1-4728-475-4-6.

In this book, the prominent political scientist Mark Galeotti certifies his extensive knowledge of military and political developments in Russia over the last 30 years and the nature of Vladimir Putin's regime. The book provides extraordinary insights into Russia's military technologies and the structure and organization of its armed forces. Based on interviews and primary sources from within Russia, it expands upon Galeotti's previous research and publications. This combination of source material gives it uniqueness and provides new understanding of the development of the Russian political and military system. Galeotti approaches his subject matter in chronological order, using a catchy academic writing style. The book is an easy read for an audience that may not be familiar with Russian politics and foreign affairs.

Galeotti provides a comprehensive analysis of Russia's military goals and the role of Putin's ideology, which is aimed at creating a "Great Russia" with a powerful military. Galeotti highlights the pitiful situation of the Russian army after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and how Putin went about rebuilding the military. In particular, he focuses on Russia's wars on Chechnya, Georgia, and Ukraine and its involvement in other military conflicts such as the war in Syria. Using a wide range of sources, the author analyzes the changes Russia's military has undergone during its participation in those conflicts and what the army's general staff has learned from its mistakes.

Galeotti's book was published in 2022, a couple of months after Putin launched the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. As the author admits, the invasion required him to add an extra chapter to his original manuscript. In my opinion, this new information only strengthens his claims and arguments. Step by step, Galeotti shows how Putin initiated his offensive in Ukraine and furthered his obsession with regaining control over the former Soviet sphere of influence. Most importantly, Galeotti's analysis of the Russian military system, its military strategy, and its available technology explains why Putin is failing to reach his goals in Ukraine and how Russia's militarization is only making the lives of ordinary Russian citizens worse.

The book contains five parts, each of which is devoted to a specific period of time. The first part focuses on the collapse of the Soviet Union, a period of rampant corruption and low morale in the military, Russia's first war in Chechnya, and interventions in Moldova and Tajikistan. The next two parts focus on Putin's launch of military reforms and the wars in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria. He then analyzes the technological and personnel structures of Russia's military and the failure of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In conclusion, he speculates about the future of the Russian military and Putin's regime.

Galeotti's book offers a timeline of events that helps the reader understand why Russia's military and political expansion into its neighboring countries is a keystone of Putin's regime. The book outlines the main goals of almost every war that Putin has launched so far. It contends that Putin's main strategy going forward involves even larger

military actions. Galeotti says that Russia's increasing military strength will allow it to compete on an equal footing with the other great powers. Above all, it would rein in the United States as the dominant world super-power (pp. 82–92). Putin's aggressive military actions in Russia's neighboring states legitimize his ideology, which is aimed at Russia's ultimate dominance in world affairs. Russia's military strength, which Putin showcases at the Victory Day parades in Moscow every ninth of May, lies at the core of that ideology. Galeotti states that Putin and his ministers of defense want to popularize military service in Russian society (pp. 143–154). His analysis leads me to believe that the political elite in Russia is trying to create something like a "Russian Sparta."

The most notable part of Galeotti's book is his analysis of the Russian military hierarchy and Russia's military system in general. He provides large amounts of data and a comprehensive analysis of why Russia's early post-Soviet military interventions in Chechnya, and later in Georgia and Ukraine, failed despite huge state investment in the military. He believes the main reason is the high level of corruption in Russia's military system and the Russian state overall. Other reasons are certain weaknesses of the military, which include a tradition of hazing (*dedovshchina*), officers' lack of knowledge of modern military strategy, and an unwillingness to learn from mistakes. Galeotti adds to the list neglect of equipment maintenance, poorly trained troops, and an army that is built to handle small regional conflicts, not a full-scale invasion like that in Ukraine.

In 2012, Putin replaced Anatoly Serdyukov with Sergei Shoigu as defense minister in the hope that he could lead reforms that would increase Russia's military strength. Reforms have been implemented, but with little sign of remarkable success. The only solution is completely rebuilding Russia's entire system and its way of thinking. Galeotti argues that modernizing military hardware cannot show results when the system as a whole is still functioning on the old Soviet model (pp. 156–167). The Russian army is billing itself as the second strongest army in the world because it is developing new, powerful weapons systems. However, the military leadership is still resting on the laurels of victory in World War II and naively believes everything the Kremlin's propagandists are telling them. The army's strength has always been the enormous human resources it can call upon, combined with the ruling regime's indifference to expending the lives of ordinary citizens. In short, the author is very critical of way Russia's military is organized. He believes that given Russia's existing military organization, it is impossible for Russia to achieve anything more than a stalemate in any conflict (pp. 343–355).

Galeotti's second main theme is Russia's strategy in its latest wars. Focusing on the current war on Ukraine, Galeotti describes in detail the developmental stages of the conflict and Putin's main political goals. He describes Russia's war plans and the ways Putin has tried to execute them. In my opinion, the author could put a little bit more effort into this section by telling us why Putin refused to stop in 2014 and instead launched his offensive into Ukraine in 2022. Galeotti confesses that at the beginning of 2022 when Russia was building up its military near the Ukraine border, he believed that the chances the Russian military would launch a full-scale invasion were around 30–40% (pp. 343–355). Of course, many Western analysts held a similar opinion.

The question is, does Galeotti understand the Russian military but not the fascist nature of Putin's regime? He could be more critical of the West's approval of the Minsk Accords in 2014, which created a stalemate and an environment for further Russian aggression in Ukraine. After admitting that he was wrong in his speculation about the possibility of a full-scale invasion, he predicts possible further conflicts and scenarios for Russia's future political development. He claims that both Ukraine and Russia will struggle to achieve success in their respective counter-offensives and offensives. But he believes that the Ukrainians, with Western support, have a better chance of regaining their occupied territories than Russia does of defeating Ukraine (pp. 355–366). From a contemporary point of view, Galeotti is right: the war has turned into a bloody exchange of artillery fire in which both sides are sustaining huge losses.

The information in the book that should be looked at the most critically concerns the tactics used by Russia during the recent wars. It is hard to doubt the author's knowledge of the Russian Army's personnel and technologies. However, he is a political, not a military scientist and his analysis of the conflicts must be viewed with caution. In this work, Galeotti mostly retells Russia's moves during the conflict in a popular way, rather than pursuing an in-depth analysis of both belligerents' strategies. His statements could stand verification by an experienced military scientist, but they outline a topic for research that military scientists could profitably explore.

Galeotti sometimes puts too much effort into specifying Russian military equipment in detail for the reader. The information is valuable, but instead of trying to characterize each model of tank that the Russian military has, the author could focus more on the nature of Putin's regime and historical similarities of Russia's contemporary wars with other conflicts in the twentieth century. More attention could be paid as well to Putin's other forms of warfare. For example, the author could elaborate upon the role of information warfare and propaganda in each conflict. At times, Galeotti's book seems like an overview of Russian military history in the last 30 years. The reader would welcome more of his thinking about Putin's desire to revive Russian imperialism and other aspects of his ideology.

Nevertheless, Galeotti has given us a valuable analysis of Putin's role in creating Russia's policy of aggression against its neighboring countries. His main point is that Putin is building up a strong military and launching military interventions in neighboring states in order to preserve the Soviet sphere of influence and challenge the United States' global dominance. Rebuilding the strong military that won victory over Nazi Germany in World War II is one of the main pillars of Putin's ideology, one which he clings very strongly. Galeotti provides us with the main reasons why Putin is still having little success with his military policy. It is not because he lacks modern weapons systems but rather because of the military's structure, which is highly corrupt and based on internal competition and humiliation, not collaboration. With his aggressive yet unsuccessful foreign policy and faced with the impact of Western economic sanctions, Putin is slowly digging a grave for his regime.

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