

For Immediate Release



AUB professor publishes book on Putin's new Russia and its role in the region

Beirut, Lebanon- 04/12/2013 -A new book on Russia's influence in the Middle East, authored by AUB Student Affairs Dean Talal Nizameddin, who also teaches political studies, has recently been published by Hurst and Co. in the United Kingdom.

Titled "Putin's New Order in the Middle East," the book, which was published in November, will also be distributed in the United States by Oxford University Press.

The book discusses how Vladimir Putin has almost by stealth transformed himself into an historic Russian figure. It argues that Putin's undeniable political dominance was reflected in his return to presidential control after the March 2012 elections, having placed an obedient President Dmitry Medvedev in a stop-gap presidency. Since 1999 Putin's growing power transposed itself in foreign affairs and nowhere did Russia's reemergence on the world stage have more impact than in the Middle East. Russia's new role and identity had its roots in the late Yeltsin era, but the book notes that Putin has subtly deflated the balloon of US power by cleverly manipulating developments in the Middle East including Iraq, Lebanon, the Palestinian - Israeli conflict, the Syrian revolution and other regional issues. Twenty years earlier Russia was in a very different place, and the Middle East was not a top priority. Nevertheless, Nizameddin wonders, in his book, whether Putin's Middle East policies can be reconciled with Russia's long-term interests economically and strategically.

During a recent brown bag lecture organized by the Department of Political Studies and Public Administration at the AUB Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Nizameddin discussed some of the insights he gained on Russian foreign policy while researching his book.

"Putin is first and foremost a ruthless pragmatist with no permanent friends or permanent enemies," said Nizameddin. "He is pursuing the development of his own power and that of Russia in the world."

Nizameddin explained how, when looking at Russian history, the country goes from expansion to wilting power and intermittent chaos with disorder and loss of power as happened in the 13th and 17th centuries, the 20th century with the Romanov Dynasty and the Soviet Union and currently now with Putin. With the gradual decline of the West's influence in the region, following the US' arrogant cowboy attitude that it could do whatever it wanted, there has been a power shift, which is tilting in Russia's favor.

"Still Russian foreign policy is looked at in a superficial manner, especially by the Arabs who seem to see Putin as their friend," said Nizameddin. "This is far from the actual state of

affairs, as Russia has excellent relations with Israel, especially Putin, who has forged a personal relationship with [Israeli PM Benjamin] Netanyahu.”

Nizameddin reminded the audience that most of the Russian leadership is issued from the security apparatus and is predominantly, not to say exclusively, male. They also tend to have no respect for US President Barack Obama, and Putin rejects being subjected to US haughtiness. In one word, Putin has found the perfect victim in Obama, noted Nizameddin.

“Putin sees democracy as inconvenient and is more for a ‘managed’ democracy,” explained Nizameddin. “He sees time as his ally, with Syria as a great example, and while the West wallows in inconsistencies and doubts, his own influence grows as western leaders come and go.”

Putin’s Russia knows that isolation and retreat is not an option and that is why instead of a head-on collision with the US, Russia has created important alliances to constitute a line of defense, starting with China and India. There have been many security agreements, especially with the former Soviet republics and Eastern European countries, and using the energy card as a leverage in the case of the Ukraine and Europe. “The recent shift of Ukraine from the West to the East is a clear indicator of this,” argued Nizameddin.

“Putin came to power at a time when Russians felt humiliated and were facing a myriad of internal problems and feeling disempowered in their daily lives,” noted Nizameddin. “Although Putin didn’t actually eradicate the Yeltsin era problems and corruption, he projected the image of a strong Russia that is not to be messed with.”

According to Nizameddin, the old trinity of autocracy, orthodoxy and nationalism is being repeated again, and it is mainly the rural populations that are backing him and not the middle classes. He is trying to hold a system together that doesn’t seem very stable.

“Putin remains a very interesting character, shifty, well-connected, extremely smart, a top chess player and an opportunist who knows to say the right things at the right time,” concluded Nizameddin. “As a leader he is successful and as good a poker player as a poker player can get.”

Nizameddin, who has worked and taught in the US, Europe and the Middle East, has been studying and researching Russia and the Middle East for 20 years. His first book, “Russia and the Middle East: Towards a New Foreign Policy” spanned the Yeltsin era.

“The whole concept challenged my long-held perspective about Russia and the Middle East,” said lecture moderator Hilal Khashan, professor of comparative politics in the PSPA department. “But after reading the book I changed my mind and started seeing Putin as a reinvention of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great of Imperial Russia.”

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Note to Editors

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Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full service 420-bed hospital.

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