

Introduction

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The past year has been filled with predictable yet unbelievable crises. With COVID-19 having finally come to a soft ebb, it seemed as if the world was returning to some sort of a familiar normality. However, the events that began during the wee hours of 24 February 2022 shattered any such expectations. Since this moment, the world has faced an interconnected cascade of diverse and precarious issues – refugee flows from Ukraine to the Baltic states, Poland, and wider Europe, economic woes in the form of inflation and high commodity prices, blackmail over fuel and grain, and a Ukraine that continues to fight for its – and our – values, independence, and freedom. Those infamous three days to Kyiv transformed into months of resolute resistance.

Each of these issues has one single nexus that connects them all together – a rabid and revisionist Russia, striking out at those phantoms that it has constructed in its mind over the past two decades of political and societal paranoia. In past editions of the Conference on Russia Papers, we have asked such questions as how the West could come to pragmatic, workable understandings with the Kremlin or how we could at least come to shape the possibility of such understandings. The time to ask such questions has long passed, and perhaps they were even futile in the first place, rooted in wishful and overly optimistic thinking for the future. Nevertheless, the question that remains now is not even how to tame the bear, but instead how to muzzle it, making sure that no one else will ever again feel the snap of his ever-hungry jaws. This is the mission of the current publication, *The Winter of Russia's Discontent*.

In this volume, we have collected the opinions and analyses of policy-makers, analysts, practitioners, and academics on what threats Russia poses and what solutions can be forwarded and what defenses can be raised. In the first section, we engage with this theme from the position of global powers and regions that must interact with Russia in one arena or another. Following these analyses, we then delve into the specific future permutations of the Russian idea. Finally, we focus on particular extant weaknesses within Russia, weighing them vis-à-vis current global crises in the third section.

Our intention is that this *mélange* of expert academic analyses, specialist prognoses, and opinion pieces can be used to inform the emerging policy and academic debates that have proliferated after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and will continue to do so. While these chapters delve into these hypothetical futures and concrete presents of Russia in the contemporary paradigm of the war, the war itself will end one day, and certain difficult choices will have to be made. How will the reconstruction, integration, and future defense of Ukraine look like, to ensure that such atrocities never again repeat? How do we engage with Russia, which will always be Europe's most significant neighbor, cognizant of its current refusal to engage with the very premises of transatlantic, European, and liberal democratic values? While we do not promise to have answers to these questions, let them act as a guiding light throughout the following pages.