

a political patron of the space program, the passing of Sergei Korolev, the administrative genius behind the space program, and the tragic death of Gagarin, a beloved public hero, all dealt significant blows to the program and its image. Despite continuing operations, the program experienced a noticeable decline in public enthusiasm, confidence, and success compared to the beginning of the decade. Part 6 explores the final decade of Leonid Brezhnev's leadership through the collapse of the Soviet Union. This period witnessed a gradual but perceptible loosening of state control over the Red Stuff, reflecting broader political and social changes within the country. Additionally, it saw the emergence of independent initiatives reshaping the Red Stuff, led by diverse actors including artists, designers, writers, and film directors. Part 7 delves into why the Red Stuff escaped harsh scrutiny following the Soviet regime's downfall despite widespread criticism of the system. The public discourse, literature, and cinema dissociated party ideology from the Soviet space program's history. Consequently, cosmonauts retained their revered status as symbols of a past era filled with utopian aspirations tied to space exploration. Today, nostalgia for spaceflight's optimism is separate from nostalgia for communism. The book concludes with a thought-provoking Epilogue.

The book's primary strength lies in its meticulous analysis of previously overlooked sources, including visual and material culture, films, and literature, which are rich with intriguing and captivating details. Its main arguments are compelling and significantly contribute to the cultural history of the Soviet/Russian space program, as well as broader Soviet and Russian studies.

While the book briefly touches upon cosmonaut rituals and superstitions, a deeper exploration into this hidden aspect and the mystical undercurrents overshadowed by the official narrative and practices would have enriched the text. This includes delving into the movement of Russian cosmism, suppressed by Iosif Stalin, which encompassed themes such as cosmic energies and utopian fantasy about humanity's role in reshaping the cosmos.

By pioneering a detailed examination of the cultural history of cosmonauts, the book provides invaluable insights into the complexities of image construction, maintenance, and negotiations within the Soviet Union and Russia. It is a persuasive resource not only for scholars but also for anyone interested in the cultural history of the Soviet/Russian space program and its cosmonauts, as well as the broader history of the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia.

## **Samuel Ramani. *Russia in Africa: Resurgent Great Power or Bellicose Pretender?***

**London: Hurst Publishers, 2023. v, 445 pp., Notes. Index. £45.00, hard bound.**

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One of the many puzzles about Russia today is whether it is a great power resurging or in terminal decline. If it is indeed once again on the rise, then we should see its influence spreading beyond its immediate neighborhood and furthering Russian interests much farther abroad. But too often, power and influence are assessed in international

relations according to the amount a country spends on its military, and the longevity, health, wealth (usually measured in gross domestic product), and size of its population. If we added all of these things up and compared contemporary Russia to China or the United States, one would conclude that the country, despite Vladimir Putin's ambitions, is not the third pole of the tent in an emerging multi-polar world. It simply does not have enough of anything to be more than a regional power—a threat to its neighbors, perhaps, but not really an important presence elsewhere.

But this approach to assessing relative power overlooks other means by which Russia's influence has spread globally, despite not having "the most" of any traditional power resource. Samuel Ramani's *Russia in Africa* probably the most comprehensive recent study of Russia's resurgence in Africa, makes this point exceedingly well. Ramani notes at the outset that more than thirty years after the Soviet collapse, Russia is resurgent in many ways in Africa. Not only has Putin's government signed military-technical agreements with more than twenty African countries and developed various mining and energy contracts, but it has used private security groups like Wagner to supply weapons and support coups and conflicts in Libya, Mali, and Burkina Faso. Russian trade relationships have been restored and greatly extended from the Soviet period in much of North Africa, and Putin's government has "feted heads of state from forty-three African countries" (1), emphasizing Russia's global ambitions. As the US has retreated behind an "America First" foreign policy, Putin's Russia has seized opportunities and offered partnerships to autocrats from the Sahel to southern Africa.

Ramani's study is impressively comprehensive. He begins by reviewing the late Soviet era retreat from Africa and the Middle East, but his main focus is on Russia's presence in Africa following the Soviet collapse in 1991. He correctly notes that while a great deal of attention is paid to China's Belt and Road policies on the African continent, Russia's activities there have received shorter shrift. In the 1990s, when Boris El'tsin, Russia's first elected president, had to deal with an economic catastrophe and then struggled to build a market economy with accountable political institutions, there was little time and few resources to pursue economic interests abroad. This situation changed as Russian economic fortunes improved in the early to mid-2000s. By the end of Putin's second term as president in 2008, Russia had repaired many of its relationships with Soviet era partners in North Africa, and gradually moved south in expanding its interests in mineral reserves in Central African Republic, Zimbabwe, and Gabon, while selling weaponry in Sudan, Guinea, and Liberia, for example. Along the way the Russian government signed deals to gain development rights to one of the world's largest bauxite reserves and 1.2 million tons annually of aluminum, thereby extending Russian influence over global aluminum prices (65). Putin's government has been able to compensate for some trade losses suffered after the loss of Ukrainian manganese after the seizure of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 by turning to Gabon, for example, to find a new supply of manganese (65).

Ramani notes that Russia operates very differently in Africa than does China, or the US in particular. Whereas China's Belt and Road has focused on building infrastructure in exchange for disadvantageous loans for recipient countries and has then used Chinese firms and workers to do the actual construction of roads, bridges, and the like, Russia has been in the business of Soviet era debt forgiveness in exchange for lucrative mineral extraction partnerships.

Perhaps the most valuable asset Russia has to offer budding and established African autocrats, however, is an alternative to partnership with the US. Whereas the US imposes conditions on aid and loans—measurable improvements in accountable government, corruption control, or respect for human rights for example—contemporary Russia asks comparatively little of its African partners beyond financial deals. It has not returned to the continent to spread a particular model of governance. And for many African leaders,

perhaps this is the attraction in choosing to work with Russia over their former European colonial masters, or preachy Americans, as Ramani argues. As the war in Ukraine has dragged on, and Russia's economy has become ever more decoupled from the west, it is its relationships in the Global South, and Africa in particular, that have helped it to feed its war effort. Ramani is less sanguine, however, on whether Russia's resurgence in Africa is sustainable in the long run. Its relationships with African countries tend to be transactional and contingent rather than based on deeply shared interests and values. In the end, Putin's Russia is not a "bellicose pretender," and if it is not quite a great power in Africa, Ramani's study indicates that it is nonetheless a disruptive and influential presence on the continent.

## **Susanne Schattenberg. *Brezhnev: The Making of a Statesman*.**

**Trans. John Heath. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023. xviii, 484 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Chronology. Glossary. Index. Photographs. Figures. Tables. Maps. \$36.00, hard bound. \$36.00, eBook.**

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Considering that Leonid Brezhnev's "unchallenged eighteen-year reign" (2) as leader of the Soviet Union concluded more than forty years ago, the fact that this work, the first biography of Brezhnev by a western scholar to employ a wealth of archival and other sources, has appeared only recently is remarkable. As Susanne Schattenberg notes in her comprehensive biography of one of the most important figures in the second half of twentieth century Soviet history, there are many reasons why this book took so many years to come to fruition. We now have a biography of Brezhnev that does justice both to the man and his legacy. Despite the author's occasionally apologetic perspective toward her subject, *Brezhnev: The Making of a Statesman* redresses a longstanding deficit of scholarship on the man who, depending on one's perspective, embodied either the "era of stagnation" or the "era of stability."

The characterization of Brezhnev as "Khrushchev without Khrushchev" (2) that Schattenberg mentions in her introduction is both simultaneously true and untrue. Brezhnev can be considered as a reformer and a champion of the status quo. While he was the apotheosis of a risk-averse Soviet leadership, Brezhnev was also the person most responsible for promoting the enthusiastic reformer Mikhail Gorbachev to the highest levels of the USSR's governing apparatus.

Able translated by John Heath, *The Making of a Statesman* adds nuance to the life and times of a man who, in his later years and after his death in 1982, became a byword to describe the sclerotic Soviet gerontocracy. Schattenberg convincingly argues that Brezhnev's pragmatic détente with the west was mixed with an inherent conservatism and ideological rigidity. It is also important to contextualize this biography by remembering the perception of Brezhnev's legacy within the Soviet Union at the time and within Russia today. Far from being viewed only as a period of stagnation, this period is officially referred to by the Putin