
‘Geopolitics and the Clash of Ideologies: Dawn of a New Order’ is a provocative account of events that have – and still are – shaping current international relations. From United States’ vanishing dominance, to Russia’s annexation of Crimea, Kosovo’s ‘independence’ and the war against ISIS, Müllerson, a post-Cold War era Estonian international lawyer who worked on both sides of the Iron Curtain, is straightforward and personally impersonal in his expert narrative of international crises. How does the American dominance translate for the rest of the world? Is there any better way forward? What is the new order whose dawn we are all awaiting? ‘Geopolitics and the Clash of Ideologies’ craftily answers some of these questions and gives food for thought for further intellectual (and practical) exploration of our common and, hopefully, civilised future.

In Chapter 1, Müllerson explains his (social science) research methodology. He begins by confessing his personal biases of an Estonian, educated in Russia, who served as a professor of international law in Moscow, London and now in Tallinn. His experience at the United Nations and post-Cold War academic and advisory work lend credentials for what is meant to be an objective research against the sea of misinformation. He does not take sides in current conflicts and prefers considering international actors as equal molecules (albeit different in size) that allow for a rational and logical analysis.

Müllerson explains his view on the world and international developments through a prism – or rather a triangle – of (i) ideology, (ii) geopolitics and (iii) international law. International law provides a bridge between geopolitics and ideology, while geopolitics contributes to the effective functioning of international law. But what is geopolitics? According to Müllerson, geopolitics is a crucial layer or a central feature of international relations that contains...
several elements, geography and politics among them. Geopolitics is also a tool through which researchers and analysts consider international developments from a bird’s perspective. For example, in analysing the role of China in the South China Sea, a research devoid of geopolitics would yield the results that the tensions in the area are due to China’s relations with its neighbours. However, geopolitics reveals – according to Müllerson – that the most important relationship in the South China Sea is actually that between China and the United States.

In Chapter 2, Müllerson discusses ideologies, in particular the dominance of the American ideology. After the collapse of the USSR, of the two then-existing ideologies – liberal-democracy and the free market on the one hand, and communism on the other hand – only the former remained. (As a side note, Müllerson considers China as a capitalist country in disguise.) The now-dominant Western liberal democratic ideology is the only ‘correct’ one that determines who is on right side of history. Hence, the United States is attempting to assert its ideology and dominance over Russia (and the rest of the world). In fact, according to Müllerson, the United States dreams the American dream for the entire world regardless of its (often non-beneficial) effects on non-American States.

The dominant Anglo-American narrative presupposes that there is only one correct way of life, that is, free markets and liberal democracy, which attempts to homogenise the world. “The freer market, the greater the economic inequality; the greater the economic inequality, the lesser democracy” (p. 84), writes Müllerson. There is much chaos and turmoil in the world precisely because of America’s attempts to blindly transplant its system to other parts of the world, without considering other States’ context. What would really benefit the world is the United States realising that the world is too big and too complex to be governed from one centre – Washington D.C.

It is, actually, the West that is in dire need for political and economic transformations. Instead of exporting its homogenous ideology, Müllerson suggests that West should borrow practices from the East or, even better, find novel ways of turning away from extreme individualism. Having an ideology is good, but having diverse and equal (i.e., heterogeneous) ideologies that coexist is even better, if not essential.

In Chapter 3, titled ‘West versus Russia – or vice versa?’, Müllerson transitions from considering the ideology(ies) to geopolitics. He writes about America’s application of its dominant ideology to the world, and why is this approach not working. Exporting the dream of America’s elite to the world negatively affects the invisible strings attached among the various players in different regions.