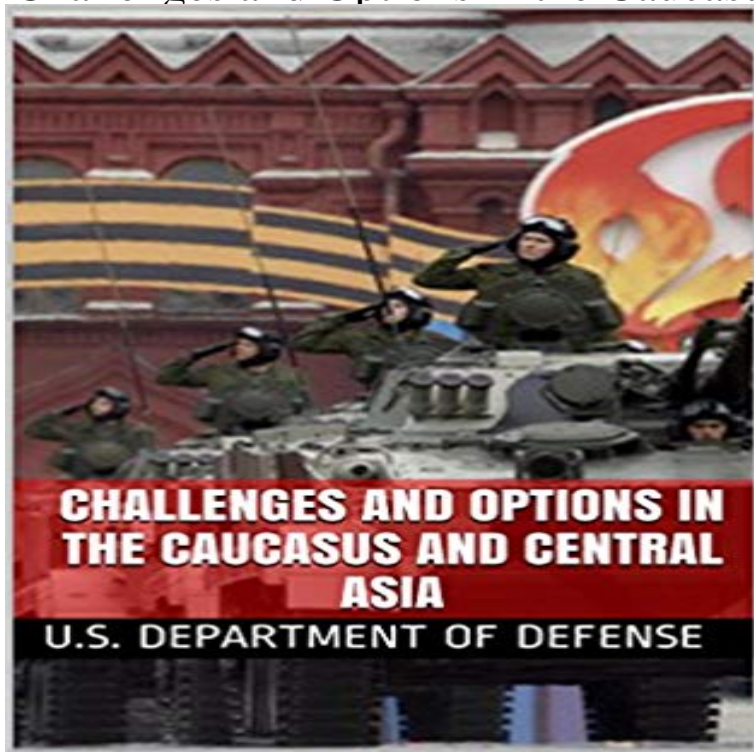


Challenges and Options in the Caucasus and Central Asia



In April 1997, the U.S. Army War College held its Eighth Annual Strategy Conference. This year's topic was Russia's Future as a World Power. Dr. Pavel K. Baev, a senior researcher at the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo, Norway, discusses the disintegration of order along Russia's southern border. Following a brief overview of the evolution of Russian policies in the Caucasus and Central Asia in the immediate post-Soviet period, Dr. Baev evaluates the impact of the Chechen war and then analyzes the growing role that petroleum plays in the political equation. He concludes that the growth of nationalism among the states in the Caucasus and Central Asia has combined with the decline in capability of the Russian Army to encourage many of the states to seek greater autonomy from Russian influence. While Russia is in strategic retreat, the political forces acting upon President Yeltsin are so intense as to increase the possibility that hasty and unwise decisions may be forthcoming. Turbulence in the so-called near abroad and political weakness at home plagued Russia at the turn of the century, forcing Tsar Nicholas II to turn to his more conservative and autocratic advisors for advice and policy. A fledgling move toward democratization was weakened even before Russia found itself embroiled in World War I. As this century turns, the course of Russian democracy again hinges, to a degree, on events on Russia's periphery.

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