



Review

Reviewed Work(s): Russia's Foreign Policy: Ideas, Domestic Politics and External Relations by David Cadier and Margot Light

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Source: *European Review of International Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2017), pp. 90-92

Published by: Verlag Barbara Budrich

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26593654>

REFERENCES

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David Cadier and Margot Light (eds.), *Russia's Foreign Policy: Ideas, Domestic Politics and External Relations*

(Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), pp. 245, ISBN 978-1-137-46887-1

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Russian foreign policy has arguably been the subject of growing attention since Vladimir Putin's rise to power in 1999. The country's leader has spoken confidently about Russia's resurgence in regional and global affairs, and has sought to secure its international position through an increasingly assertive foreign policy. Notwithstanding these trends, Russia's annexation of the Crimean peninsula in March 2014 has caught many Western analysts by surprise. The Kremlin's continuing violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Ukraine, despite the economic impact of Western sanctions, marked a qualitative change in Russia's relationship with its neighbours, Europe, and the US.

The new volume, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Ideas, Domestic Politics and External Relations* edited by David Cadier and Margot Light is one of the few monograph-length works that examines ways in which Russia's domestic imperatives have shaped its recent foreign policy decisions and actions. The book grew out of the 2013 conference held at the London School of Economics and was envisioned as a volume providing deeper and longer-term insights into the various aspects of Russia's foreign policy under the leadership of President Putin (p. 3). While the individual chapters retain this original focus, they also utilise the Ukrainian crisis as a timely case study for illustrating the arguments they make about the determinants of Russian foreign policy.

The volume is divided into three parts looking at the ideational context in which Russian foreign policy is formulated, the influence of domestic political structures and strategies, and the drivers of Russia's actions in different segments of its external relations. The volume's contributors, which include academics, think tank analysts, and former practitioners, offer a range of interpretations of Russian foreign policy, but in the end they all agree that Russia's international behaviour is fundamentally driven by objectives linked to domestic regime consolidation (p. 205).

The edited volume accomplishes its main goal of analysing the evolution and main determinants of Russia's foreign policy rather successfully. However, much of this analysis will not be new for the area studies specialists, particularly those familiar with the works of several contributors renowned for their expertise in the field. For instance, the first chapter, 'Russian Foreign Policy Themes in Official Documents and Speeches: Tracing Continuity and Change' by Margot Light shows

how the search for Russia's great Power status, the declared preference for a multi-polar world and support of the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference in states' internal affairs have become perennial concerns in Russian foreign policy (p. 26). The chapter also illuminates a recent 'ideological turn' in Russia's foreign policy and sets the platform for the subsequent exploration of the increasingly conservative and nationalistic tone of Russia's foreign policy discourse, a shift in Russia's international position from a *status quo* to a revisionist Power, and a previously unseen level of animosity towards Europe.

Tomila Lankina and Kiga Niemczuk review the unfolding of Russia's soft power repertoire, in particular the "vertically integrated propaganda networks" disseminating a positive image of Russia abroad, and the Russian Orthodox Church promoting conservative-patriotic values articulated on behalf of Russia by its President (p. 105). By examining how these and other actors undermine the moral edge of Western Powers, elevate Russia's status as a great Power state, and employ other soft power strategies, the chapter offers an excellent addition to the new line of scholarship on autocracy promotion abroad.¹ Andrew Kuchins' contribution, 'Mismatched Partners: US-Russia Relations after the Cold War,' traces incompatibilities of Washington's and Moscow's capabilities and interests, and also unmet expectations since the collapse of the USSR through the crisis in Ukraine. David Cadier surveys Russia's foreign policy towards the post-Soviet space focusing on the role of the Eurasian Economic Union as its structural basis. Together with Natasha Kuhrt's 'Russia and Asia-Pacific: Diversification or Sinocentrism?' and Ian Bond's 'Russia in International Organizations: The Shift from Defence to Offence', both addressing underexplored areas of Russian foreign policy, these, and other contributions to the volume, put forward a comprehensive and engaging discussion of the subject accessible to the broader academic and non-academic readership.

From the theoretical and practical standpoint, the most valuable insight from reading the volume is that ideas, beliefs, and ideology powerfully shape the state foreign policy. Implicitly, the chapters of the book suggest that Russia's own conceptual lens, not the Western theoretical constructs, can furnish a deeper understanding of Russia's foreign policy choices. Going further, several chapters of the book trace the roots of these ideas and views to Putin's own biography, Russia's history, and the everyday vagaries of the country's domestic situation. For instance, Fiona Hill's chapter, 'How Vladimir Putin's World View Shapes Russian Foreign Policy', building on her earlier monograph co-authored with Clifford Gaddy² weaves the little known details of Putin's background into a complex identity structure of the Russian President. Putin's identity as a statist, history man, and survivalist are used to explain the goals and priorities that he has formulated for Russian foreign policy, while his identity of outsider, free marketeer, and case officer have been linked to the methods of achieving Russia's goals abroad (p. 44). Hill shows how these same identities have informed Putin's views on and responses to developments in the Ukraine.

- 1 Thomas Ambrosio, *Authoritarian Backlash: Russian Resistance to Democratization in the Former Soviet Union* (Farnham, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008); Nichole J. Jackson, 'The Role of External Factors in Advancing Non-liberal Democratic Forms of Political Rule: A Case Study of Russia's Influence on Central Asian Regimes,' *Contemporary Politics* 16.1 (2010), pp. 101–118.
- 2 Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2015, 2nd edition).

In a rare foil to the prevailing opinion characterising Russia's political opposition as impotent in affecting Russia's conduct abroad, Richard Sakwa argues that supporters of a more liberal and pluralist system are very active at various levels of the state administration. Sakwa's chapter, 'Dualism at Home and Abroad: Russian Foreign Policy Neo-revisionism and Bicontinentalism' explains the manifest inconsistency between the Kremlin's appeal to international law and institutions and its determination to act independently of any international constraints by the domestic political dualism transpiring in the interaction of the constitutional and autocratic forces (p. 65).

Andrey Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk's chapter 'Retracting Europe: Biopolitical Conservatism and Art Protest in Putin's Russia' is exemplary in its search for new analytical categories that help us understand Russia's voluntary and unexpected reconsideration of its European identity, including through the imagery and narratives of cultural protests against the regime that inadvertently reinforce non-European features in Russia's modern identity. The authors unearth Russia-EU conflicts over meanings of energy security, market liberalisation, and other notions that underpin the new animosity in Russia's relations with the EU. Drawing on the Foucaudian understanding of biopolitics as the production of the disciplinary society, the chapter demonstrates how the Kremlin's conservative hegemonic discourse portraying Europe as an alleged source of perversions and deviations from the "normal corporeal practices" (p. 154) has been contested by discourses of cultural resistances represented by the punk Pussy Riot band. Although the dominating discourse of power and the counter-discourse deploring the value gap between Russia and the EU stand on sharply dissimilar ideological platforms, the unintended consequence of their Russia-EU juxtaposition is the marginalisation of voices insisting on Russia's European prospects (p. 155).

All in all, whether by disparaging the idea of Western democracy as an attractive model for emulation, discursively reconstructing the meaning of Europe, going on an offensive in international organisations, or looking for allies in the East, Putin's regime has used foreign policy and control over Russia's neighbours as a crucial tool of national building and protecting his power inside of the state. This is the key premise of the edited volume. It should also be noted, however, that the relationship between the domestic imperatives and foreign policy goes both ways. Not only has Moscow's foreign policy been used to muster public support for the regime at home and to elevate Russia's stature internationally, including by providing moral justification for its self-assertiveness, but the official discourses of Russia's identity and domestic relations of power have provided a 'strategic rationale' and ideological persuasion for Moscow's projection of soft and hard power in the neighbourhood and further abroad.