

BOOK REVIEW:

“Russia and the World in the Putin Era: From Theory to Reality in Russian Global Strategy” edited by Roger E. Kanet and Dina Moulioukova.

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Russia and the World in the Putin Era: From Theory to Reality in Russian Global Strategy” edited by Roger E. Kanet and Dina Moulioukova, Routledge, 2022, 318 pp

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After Vladimir Putin came to office, there have been dramatic shifts in Russian domestic and foreign policies. “Russia and the World in the Putin Era: From Theory to Reality in Russian Global Strategy” edited by Roger E. Kanet and Dina Moulioukova analyzes broad aspects of Russian foreign policy, Russian political identity, NATO expansion and Russia’s reaction. The aim of this volume is to shed some light on the factors that influence Russian foreign policy and to show the reasons behind the deterioration of Russian relations with the West in recent years.

Roger E. Kanet is Professor Emeritus of Political Science at both the University of Miami and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, U.S.A. He has been the primary editor for 36 edited books and 5 special issues of journals. He has contributed over 155 chapters to edited volumes and published 95 peer-reviewed journal articles. Besides “Russia and the World in the Putin Era: From Theory to Reality in Russian Global Strategy”, R. Kanet recent edited/coedited works include “Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century, The New Security Environment: The Impact On Russia, Central And Eastern Europe”; “A Resurgent Russia and the West: The European Union, NATO and Beyond”; “Power, Politics and Confrontation in Eurasia: Foreign Policy in a Contested Region”; “Russia, Eurasia and the New Geopolitics of Energy: Confrontation and Consolidation”; “Routledge Handbook of Russian Security”.

Dina Moulioukova is a Lecturer of International Studies at the University of Miami, U.S.A. She is Assistant Director and co-founder of the Global Security Initiative. D. Moulioukova completed her PhD at the University of Miami with focus on innovative approaches to security studies. Prior to her studies at UM, Dr. Moulioukova received her Master of Law degree (LL.M.) at the University of Cambridge.

Collective authors attempt to analyze the factors that affect Russian foreign policy and, in particular, the reasons behind deterioration of

relations between Russia and the West over recent years. What happened to bring about this dramatic turnabout? To what extent was this change largely the result of the Russian reaction to Western actions, such as the expansion of NATO into formerly Soviet space? To what extent does it respond to authoritarian developments in domestic politics in Russia since the rise of Vladimir Putin and his supporters to power and to their commitment to reestablishing the “Great Power” image of Russia that coincides with the centuries-old view of Russia under both the czars and Soviet leaders? The readers can find answers to these questions at length in the book.

The book is organized around eleven interrelated topics. The first part of the book, entitled “Sources and tools of Russian foreign policy”, explore broad aspects of Russian policy. More specifically, in the first chapter, “Russia’s self-image as a great power”, Dina Moulioukova, with Roger E. Kanet, outlines the long historical development of Russia’s view of itself as one of the dominant states in the world. In this part, Dina Moulioukova and Roger E. Kanet have given a generalized statement that the self-perception as a great power is one of the fundamental aspects of Russia’s identity and its sense of ontological security (p.12). Referring to Richard Pipes, the authors argues that Russia’s identity as a great power is closely linked with Russia’s geography (p.13). In the geographic sense, Russia lacks any clearly defined borders, which makes it vulnerable to attack from its neighbors. Or, to put it differently, physical security threats led to an increased need for a strong leader who could mobilize people effectively. This ontological need has been a main motivator for Russia’s foreign policy for centuries, and even it remains a driving force today (p.15).

Discussing the Russia foreign policy and the return to authoritarian roots, Roger E. Kanet and Dina Moulioukova bring out that it is the communal nature of Russian society that granted favorable conditions for further implanting the ontological need for a strong leader (p.14). Russian perception of authority throughout the centuries has been historically ingrained in perceiving a strong state as a guarantor of physical security and political stability (p.18).

Many different ethnic groups and languages that were annexed to Russia as a result of her expansionist aspirations made it more difficult to define Russian identity (p.20). Championing the idea of the unification

of all Slavs under the leadership of Russia, Panslavism portrays Russian ontological awareness as different from that of the West. Followers of this belief assert that Russia's integration into Europe has always been accompanied by the sense of inferiority and disdain from Europe for its backwardness. The authors highlight that the lack of acceptance of Russia as an equal among Western European powers subsequently affects the construction of the Russian biographic narrative and the basis of the country's ontological awareness (p.23).

Dina Moulioukova and Roger E. Kanet intriguingly assume that rather than viewing Russia as a backward, almost barbaric, society with a repressive political system, acknowledgment of Russia's status by European states was crucial for the external approval of Russia's self-perception as a great power. In authors' opinion, this lack of acceptance possibly triggered ontological anxiety in Russia's biographic narrative (p.24).

Furthermore, the authors are of the view that 'conflict with the West brings internal identity coherence...In present-day Russia, these fears have been used by Russian elites to consolidate the power in the face of external pressures and economic challenges' (p.25).

In the second chapter, "Russian strategic culture and renewed conflict with the West", Roger E. Kanet identifies that over the centuries Russian strategic and security culture has been built on the self-perception of a great power that necessitates military power to maintain this status (p.34). This chapter mainly investigates the reasons for the deterioration of relations between Russia and the West from the early 1990s until now. After consideration the dynamics of events during last three decades, the author comes to a conclusion that it arises from exterior and interior developments which are closely interrelated (p.34). The first factor stemmed from the expansion of the liberal international order in the names of both NATO and the European Union toward the Post-Soviet space which resulted in changing Russian strategic culture in a much more assertive and aggressive way (p.35). The second development was related to Putin's accession to power and surrounded himself with former security service officers which caused to a shift in Kremlin's strategic culture and sense of national identity (p.36).

In Chapter 3, entitled "Images and Decision-making in foreign policy: the case of Vladimir Putin", Aleksandar Jankovski points out the

images of Vladimir Putin as a chief decisionmaker. Defining images as complexes of theories, the author contends that ‘decision-makers have beliefs, or stored mental representations of facts, which may be true or not, and which in part help construct the images they hold’ (p.68). By mapping out the foundational image of Vladimir Putin, Jankovski claims that it notably coincides with the Grotian image. The author reaches a conclusion that Putin, having conservative approach to international relations, predominantly believes the centrality of states in world politics (p.74). The second core ontological element of President Putin’s foundational image is ‘power plays a significant role in international affairs’ (p.76). The third and fourth ontological beliefs of President Putin’s foundational image are that the systemic balance of power and the great powers’ management are indispensable for the keeping of international order, respectively (pp.78, 82).

In the fourth chapter of Part I, “Atlanticism in an age of great power competition: is Russia achieving its goals?”, Suzanne Loftus touches upon the impact of NATO members’ reactions to Russian policy initiatives. Briefly describing great power competition during the Cold War, Loftus identifies that the main threat for the alliance at that time was the Soviet Union, since it not only posed a military threat but also a threat to the values, such as peace and democracy enshrined in the Atlantic political community (p.92). The author argues that, the destabilization of the world order that was founded on Atlantic principles after World War II enables authoritarian actors, such as Russia and China to get some more leverage in the international system (p.93). Loftus concentrates on NATO’s intervention in the former Yugoslavia without a UN mandate as a starting point of friction between the West and Russia which mostly based on a lack of shared perception of fair security architecture in Europe. In this and other cases, both Russia and China have evaluated the West’s use of “liberal interventionism,” on the premise of ensuring peace and security as a violation of a nation’s sovereignty (p.94). Loftus points out that ‘the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the financial crisis in 2008, which destabilized the world and raised doubts about the U.S.’s capacity to lead’ (p.95).

When Vladimir Putin came to power, he initially endeavored to restore relations with NATO. After the September 11 terrorist attacks Putin reached out a helping hand to the United States by granting them to use Russia’s air bases in Central Asia for access to Afghanistan. To do

this Putin was seeking to build a new security architecture where the West and Russia could be equal partners (p.95). However, the Russia–NATO relations turned aside during Putin’s second term as he gained the courage because of rising oil prices. Enlargement of NATO to the Baltic states and Western support for the Color Revolutions in Russia’s near abroad, according to Loftus, incited Putin to change his strategies toward the West (p.96). The author asserts that ‘the annexation of Crimea was the greatest revision of Europe’s geopolitical landscape since German reunification and shows to what length Russia is willing to go to defend its sphere of influence against the West’ (p.98). Analyzing the developments around NATO enlargement, Loftus comes to a conclusion that the Ukraine crisis indicates the decline of U.S. hegemony and the West’s sanctions regime is not much capable to change Russia’s behavior (p.99). Domestic challenges and tensions among allies impede the transatlantic alliance from maintaining primacy in the world (p.100). Considering the Western alliance system as the U.S.’s greatest strength to counter to China and Russia, the author expresses hopeless in front of challenges that are already irreparable (p.110).

In the fifth chapter, called “The battle of ontological narratives: Russia and the annexation of Crimea”, Dina Moulioukova and Roger E. Kanet analyze Russia’s annexation of Crimea as a struggle between views from ontological perspectives. The authors highlight that only a couple of decades ago, Russian and the Ukrainian people peacefully lived together and chose their future together in the referendum for the preservation of the Soviet Union. They conclude that ‘while seeking to build a *Russkii Mir*, the Kremlin fell victim to its own strategy and promoted the opposite – Ukraine’s consolidation with Europe’ (p.134).

In chapter 6, Arsen Gasparyan studies the role of energy in Russian foreign policy. The author discloses that the Putin administration consolidated the oil and natural gas industries into the state-owned corporations, such as Gazprom, Rosneft and Transneft. These companies have served President Putin to accomplish Russia’s global role as an energy provider in return. It can be concluded that Russia views the oil and gas ‘not just a source of wealth, but as a resource for political power and state policy’ (p.141).

The second part of the book discusses NATO's enlargement and its consequences for U.S. post-Cold War grand strategy. Rajan Menon and William Ruger in Chapter 7 assess NATO's continuing relevance after the end of the Cold War. They debate over NATO's post-Cold War expansion and its consequences. Also, the authors evaluate Russian reactions to NATO enlargement and its effects on US-Russian relations. Menon and Ruger particularly focus on the danger of constant enlargement of NATO, especially in regard to Ukraine and Georgia. The authors hold the view that 'the continuation of the Atlantic alliance has been central to the U.S.'s post-Cold War grand strategy of maintaining global primacy for several reasons' (p.179). In the end, they open a discussion on the future of NATO and Europe.

In the eighth chapter, Charles Ziegler accentuates the sanctions as a tool of choice in U.S. relations with Russia. Condemning sanctions as groundless interference in Russia's domestic affairs, Russian leaders claims that it is an attempt to curb Russia's great power ambitions. The author opines that 'Russia is far more integrated into the global economy than was the USSR, and so is more vulnerable' (p.223).

The third section of the book, "Russian policy in the developing world", Roger E. Kanet and Dina Moulioukova compare Soviet and Russian foreign policy and Nuray Ibryamova examines Russia's expanding role in the Eastern Mediterranean in Chapter 9 and Chapter 10, respectively. The last chapter has been devoted to ontological factors in Western and rising powers competition in Venezuela by Dina Moulioukova and Karina Brennan.

In a concluding section, the co-editors, Roger E. Kanet and Dina Moulioukova, stress that after a brief period, Russia under President Putin shifted to the objective of re-establishing the great power status (p.296).

The book has overwhelmingly relied upon empirical evidences rather than academic approach to prove the central argument of the study. The authors have tried to highlight official Russian version on various developments, in particular NATO-Russia contradiction, however, absence of echoing of strategic rationale for NATO enlargement make the volume seem less impartial. Despite aforementioned weaknesses, the book answers a series of questions about the nature of Russian foreign policy and her great power ambition. In addition, Russia

watchers might conceivably find some clues on the causes of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in this work. Therefore, anyone who is interested in Russian foreign policy, in particular NATO-Russia rift, should put this well-written and highly informative book in his/her reading list.