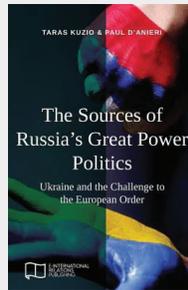

The Sources of Russia's Great Power Politics: Ukraine and the Challenge to the European Order

By Taras Kuzio and Paul D'Anieri

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Over the past decade, great power politics have become a significant topic, particularly given the rising competition between China, the U.S., and to some extent Russia. The U.S. dominated, unipolar world order that had obtained following the dissolution of the Soviet Union has started to change, and Russia as a great power has begun to restore the status that it once enjoyed during the Cold War. In this context, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) that consists of the post-Soviet countries has assumed a pivotal role in line with Moscow's policies aiming to reinforce its sphere of influence regionally and globally. In this context, as the authors discuss, Ukraine is central to restoring Russia's status and sphere of influence. *The Sources of Russia's Great Power Politics*, written by Taras Kuzio and Paul D'Anieri, indeed provides a comprehensive analysis of Russia's clashes with Ukraine. Unlike the rest of the literature handling the conflict between the two countries, it brings a different perspective. The



authors ultimately argue that the recent policies pursued by Moscow have connections to and continuity with the policies designated by the Soviet Union.

Kuzio and D'Anieri begin their book with the question of why Russia seized Crimea and pursued hybrid warfare in Ukraine's Donbas region. Rather than following the general tendency to explain Russia's annexation of Crimea as a response to the enlargement policies of Western states and institutions, or their interference in Russia's backyard, the authors contend that the main reasons go back to the early 1990s and even the Soviet era. They emphasize the pivotal role of Ukraine in the construction of Russian national identity, instead of focusing on realpolitik and the realist school of thought. Without a doubt, they adopt a distinctive approach and criticize the realist approach for not being appropriate, while explaining the underlying reasons behind Russian aggression over Ukraine.

As discussed in the third chapter, the origin of the Russia-Ukraine conflict is vague: while many blame the rise of autocracy in Russia following the collapse of the Soviet Union, others point to the Western policy of NATO enlargement. Yet, in fact, the conflicts on Crimea and Donbass occurred as a consequence of Russia's discontent over Ukraine's independence. By analyzing Russia-Ukraine relations from the collapse of the Soviet Union to the 2013-2014 political crises in Ukraine, the chapter asserts that Russia never truly accepted Ukraine's independence. Moreover, Russia's attempt to take over Crimea represents a repetitive dynamic in place since the fall of the Soviets. Russia has always justified its Ukraine policy based on historical mythology, according to which some parts of Ukraine are the foundation of modern Russia. A shared history and identity play a role in the leading factors when Russia's Ukraine policy is concerned. One of the most remarkable arguments of the chapter and even of the whole book is that Russia's Desire to deny Ukraine's independence is not a Putin-era phenomenon or caused by Western actions, but rather an inherent tendency.

Moreover, the authors present the various strategies and tactics—usually known as hybrid warfare—pursued by Russia as attempts to reimpose its influence on Ukraine. At this point, like the reasons for Russia's conflict with Ukraine, the features of hybrid warfare are claimed to date back to the Soviet and early post-Soviet era. This argument is quite unique, because such warfare strategy is often argued to be, and acknowledged as, a recent development.

Chapter 2 explains that Moscow's present-day information warfare, which mostly targets the West, is a usual practice inherited from the Soviet days. As discussed further in that chapter,

the Soviets utilized similar means ranging from subversion to the use of special forces. In the same chapter, the goals, tactics and results of similar hybrid warfare activities conducted by the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation are specified in detail. This analysis enables us to compare, contrast and eventually recognize the current warfare's historical traces. There is one significant point that is underlined in this chapter: Russia's hybrid war took on a different dimension after the color revolutions due to Moscow's belief that they were hybrid operations driven by external factors; hence, these operations required hybrid responses.

The authors go on to elaborate on the Russian perception of Ukraine, on the revolutions that occurred within the country and on the policies pursued by Western countries and institutions over the region. Such elaboration helps readers gain insight and comprehend events easily. Furthermore, the traces of Russian information warfare continuing from Soviet times are elucidated in detail in order to analyze and explain the origins of Russia's campaigns against the independence movements. In addition, the status and the probability of resolving the armed conflict going on in Ukraine are discussed in detail. In this regard, the picture drawn by the authors is indeed pessimistic.

In the last chapter, the book concludes that national identity is the main reason behind the Moscow-Kyiv conflict, and that the tactics employed today are actually the continuation of historical practices. In other words, the real story begins earlier. Thus, the information provided in the book fills a significant gap in the current literature and enables us to view the conflict from a different angle.

Overall, the book contains significant information and analysis regarding the Russia's

seizure of Crimea and hybrid war in Eastern Ukraine. It is a must-read for anyone who works on Russia, foreign policy and security policy. Its strengths clearly overshadow the minor questions that comes in mind. The field research conducted for the purpose of this study is among the strengths of the book. It is very informative and easy to read. The authors have more than enough competence, intellectual background, related research on similar subjects and unique, well-reasoned ideas. This is an important factor that makes the research even stronger. Although the Western perspective of the authors, not to mention the Ukrainian background of Taras Kuzio, could pave the way for a biased nar-

ative, alternative narratives and schools of thought, as well as previous approaches in the current literature are provided in the text. Causal relations in the chapters are well-organized. Indeed, the authors' criticisms of arguments in the current literature and their thorough critiques of several widely-accepted narratives might force readers to forget what they have learned regarding the reasons for and practices of Russia's hybrid warfare and clashes with Ukraine. Nevertheless, one should not acknowledge the ideas put forward in the study as ultimate truths but consider them as mindopening and alternative perspectives that push us to think otherwise.