

Turkish and Hungarian Turanism against Russia in the Post-Cold War Era: Nostalgia Revisits Central Asia

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Paradoxes of Nostalgia: Cold War Triumphalism and Global Disorder since 1989

By Penny M. Von Eschen

Duke University Press, 2022, 400 pages, \$30.95, ISBN: 9781478022848

Go East! A History of Hungarian Turanism

By Balázs Ablonczy

Indiana University Press, 2022, 296 pages, \$33.25, ISBN: 9780253057433

The Sources of Russian Foreign Policy Assertiveness

By Angela Borozna

Springer, 2022, 279 pages, \$106.13, ISBN: 9783030835903

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The polarity changes in the international system in the early 1990s due to the end of the Cold War was not limited to a U.S.-centered geopolitical transformation. It also brought with it an extremely determined ideological excitement. The life of this paradigm, which gained an 'iconic' place in the IR literature with Fukuyama's "The End of History" thesis, was shorter than expected. Although the challenge against neo-liberal and capitalist values is identified with the 9/11 attacks in the case of fundamentalism, the real dynamic that causes 'history to continue' is independent of the phenomena of terrorism and violence. 'Nostalgia,' which revived as a reflective phenomenon in the foreign political minds of actors with an imperial past, such as Türkiye, Russia, and Hungary, should be considered the most concrete challenge to U.S.-centrism in the present day. More clearly, romantic nationalism in actors with an imperial past in the historical process represents a highly reflective identity that is likely to be triggered in the future. This situation often manifests itself as a strong emphasis on the 'past' in the foreign policy discourses and practices of the mentioned actors. These discourses, which are extremely motivating for the public, turn into a perfect harmony between the public's expectations and foreign policy discourses after a certain period of time. These discourses, which generally target the hegemony of the dominant power in the international system, are actually evaluated in a revisionist context towards the status quo.

In this context, nationalist rhetoric, which has had a significant rise in Hungarian foreign policy in recent years, has left Türkiye's monopoly on that ideology and started to show itself in the Western axis, with a trend that can be conceptualized as neo-Turanism. On the other hand, Soviet nostalgia, which has gone beyond being an idea or rhetoric in the minds of Russian foreign policy, has already established itself on realpolitik ground. Central Asia, the main living space of the Turkic World, is seen as the main action ground of the nostalgic foreign policies of these three actors. Proceeding with this nostalgic expression at first glance seems like a conflict between neo-Turanism and Sovietism specific to the Turkic World. Still on a rational basis, this expression could mean a win-win policy rather than a zero-sum game theory for all three actors.

This review article is based on three books: Starting with Von Eschen a professor of history at the University of Virginia in Virginia U.S. who has already published extensively on U.S. diplomacy, culture, and decolonization. Her book, *Paradoxes of Nostalgia: Cold War Triumphalism and Global Disorder since 1989*, could be considered as the summary of her typical interest field. In this book, Von Eschen displayed a strong critical stance towards Fukuyama's "The End of History" thesis. According to Von Eschen, the early celebrations of the U.S.' so-called victory with the end of the Cold War pushed U.S. foreign policy to take a 'blind' stance towards new trends in the interna-

tional system. In other words, according to Von Eschen, U.S. foreign policymakers' obsessive and arrogant commitment to U.S. exceptionalism has caused them to overlook the gap that has opened up between U.S.' official foreign policy rhetoric and the practice of this rhetoric. In this regard, the author insists that there is a strong correlation between the negative image of the U.S. in Iraq and Afghanistan and the rise of right-wing and nationalist rhetoric of the Victor Orbán Administration in Hungary. Fundamentally, the author has a very clear attitude that a U.S.-style unipolar world system cannot contribute to the concepts of global peace, justice, and democracy.

In this context, although the end of the Cold War ended by U.S.-centric victory rhetoric, according to Von Eschen, this rhetoric also triggered an alternative stance among different actors. In other words, the expression of nostalgic foreign policy reflexes, especially of the Soviet Union, actually expresses alternative analyses regarding the Cold War (p. 5). Alternative history readings of the Cold War bring up a more subjective issue, such as "Is the war actually ended?" rather than focusing on objective information such as "Who won the war?" In particular, the new doctrinal understanding of U.S. foreign policy, known as the Wolfowitz Doctrine, described as the 'marriage' of militarism and free market economy, was actually perceived as a strategy based on preventing the emergence of a new superpower besides the U.S. in the international system (p. 27). This

foreign policy rhetoric expresses a rejection of the unipolar world system, not only for the main rivals of the U.S. in the Cold War period, such as the Soviet Union and Hungary, but also for the main friends of the U.S. in the Cold War period, such as Türkiye, in the following years. Nostalgic foreign policy rhetoric begins to gain effect at this point because the number of international actors who favor the unipolar world system, other than the U.S. and its ontological allies, is insufficient to maintain the unipolar world system. Moreover, the expectations for establishing global peace under the leadership of the U.S., on the axis of the events in the Bosnian war, Rwanda, and Somalia, ended in great disappointment, with the U.S. remaining a 'passive spectator' to the developments (p. 82). This situation has increased concerns that a unipolar world system centered on the U.S. will be synonymous with leaving future developments to the 'mercy' of the U.S. At this point, the main danger for the U.S. went beyond military threats and became a collectivist social spirit and decision-making process which could oppose U.S. hegemony (p. 105). In addition, as seen in the Kyrgyzstan example, the revelation of the U.S. foreign policy of consolidating neo-liberal values in different countries through 'color revolutions' through NGOs (p. 254) emerges as another dynamic that triggers romantic nationalism. In other words, the social mobilization and 're-awakening' rhetoric that foreign policies shaped around romantic nationalism can bring about in the people will prove the discourse

that ‘history still continues.’ In the final analysis, although Von Eschen strongly criticizes “The End of History” thesis in the new world order formed after the Cold War and talks about national and international reactions against U.S. hegemony, the author does not deviate from the line of the idealist paradigm. Although Von Eschen imagines the keywords of the idealist paradigm, such as disarmament and interdependence, as essential for an ideal international system, the authors of this article agree with Von Eschen’s wishes, but also argue that the U.S.-centric international system will be tested by different power centers of the international system, such as the Turkic World and these challenges to this understanding will be faithful to the realist paradigm. In this context, pan-Turkish discourses, which have been on the rise recently in Hungary under the leadership of Viktor Orbán, have again made the ideology of Turanism one of the basic foreign policy doctrines of the Turkic World.

The second book under review here is Balázs Ablonczy’s *Go East! A History of Hungarian Turanism*. Ablonczy, a senior research fellow at Eotvos Lorand University in Budapest Hungary, has published remarkable works on Turanism and the history of culture. In this book, Ablonczy analyzes the emergence of Turanism as an ideology in the historical process. According to Ablonczy, the Hungarian ‘version’ of Turanism, which is included in categorizing macro nationalism or macro ideologies, is not as radical as the perceptions of nationalist factions

in Türkiye or the Turkish Republics. On the other hand, according to Ablonczy, who perceives Turanism in a secular sense, macro nationalisms, which can be called ‘collective spirit,’ can turn into an extremely enthusiastic movement under the leadership of ‘key individuals.’ In this context, according to Ablonczy, Viktor Orbán’s political victories and the foreign policy rhetoric he built on the East cannot be understood without analyzing the theoretical and doctrinal structure of Turanism. Therefore, Ablonczy insists that modern foreign policy is a dynamic process built on social forces and historical myths.

The search for the ‘origins’ of Hungarian historians and intellectuals was extremely decisive in the emergence of the Hungarian version of Turanism as a nostalgic or romantic nationalism (p. 20). On the other hand, the historical and intellectual search for the origins of Hungarians in the 19th and 20th centuries fell silent after Hungary came under the control of the Soviet Union. However, in the post-1990 period, as the restrictive effect of socialist ideology on nationalist movements disappeared, the nationalist reflexes of Hungarians, specifically Turanism, revived (p. 11). It would be an incomplete analysis to evaluate this situation only in the context of Hungary’s adoption of nationalist rhetoric as the ‘forced ideology’ left over from socialism after the collapse of the Soviet Union. According to the authors of this article, the global disappointment created by the unipolar world system led by the U.S. with the end of the Cold War is considered

one of the most important dynamics in the revival of romantic nationalism. Because the belief expressed in traditional Cold War period analyses that the U.S. and the Soviet Union were the absolute 'others' of each other was invalidated in line with Von Eschen's theses. In other words, as a result of a U.S.-centric Cold War analysis, the strong belief that socialist ideology represented the 'dark' side of the world was replaced by the militarism of the U.S. which was supported by the free market economy. This was in the period from the 1990s to the 2000s when the Soviet Union and the U.S. had left the perception that they were actually 'brothers' in practice. In this context, the emergence of macro ideologies such as Turanism should be evaluated in the context of the search for a 'third way' of foreign policies that had lodged between capitalism and socialism. On the other hand, assuming that the Hungarians' perception of Turanism is nourished by a 'historical discovery' and rapprochement towards the Turks, which developed against the pan-Slavism and Russian threat in the historical process (p. 21). Orbán's and Erdoğan's discourses aimed at revitalizing the Turkic World are considered extremely important at this point since it is seen that the life field of Turanism and the life field of Russia intersect perfectly.

The last book under review here is *The Sources of Russian Foreign Policy Assertiveness* by Angela Borozna, who is an adjunct professor at the California State University at Fullerton, U.S. In her book, Borozna mainly focuses on

the paradox that Russian foreign policy poses to the global system. As a matter of fact, in the early 1990s, due to the end of the Cold War, a strong belief emerged that Russia, which had adopted democracy and a free market economy, would actually display a foreign policy aimed at cooperation with the West. On the other hand, Borozna, who identified 2008 as a turning point, comprehensively analyzes the return to the notions of conflict and threat that started between Russia and the West with Russia's military intervention in Georgia. Adapting her work to the neo-realist and constructivist paradigm, the author claims that Russia experienced an identity crisis with the end of the Cold War. According to Borozna, in the multipolar modern world system, Russia's way out of this identity crisis is to become one of the polar leaders again. In this process, the main living space for Russian foreign policy is, as expected, the former lands of the Soviet Union.

As previously stated in the context of Turanism, although the leading actors of this rhetoric, such as Türkiye and Hungary, are perceived as a threat to the Soviet Union because the living spaces of the Turkic World and Russia appear to be in a perfect intersection. At this point, Borozna argues that the threat perception of states is actually different from that of individuals. It is not objective in its entirety, but it is sometimes subjective (p. 12). In this context, Russia's threat perceptions are not static; on the contrary, it appears to be dynamic. It is seen that these constantly

changing threat perceptions are fed by historical enemy discourses and previous discourses with other states (p. 17).

In this context, it is possible to argue that even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Eastern European countries such as Ukraine were Russia's traditional priority, as they were a buffer zone against the threat from the West (p. 25). In this context, if the threat perception of states is built on cultural and historical experiences, as Borozna claims, and if Russia wants to be the pole leader in the multipolar modern hierarchical structure –the reviewers share this view with the author– then the main nostalgia that is likely to be revived in Russian foreign policy is in Eastern Europe –especially the Ukrainian and Polish core. Moreover, Russian policies on the Turkic World are essentially shaped by soft power; on the other hand, the Western policy of Russia is shaped by the use of hard power, as seen in the case of Ukraine. Finally, Putin's statement that Russia is not a Western actor and that it is shaped around a unique national spirit proves that Russia has a strong nostalgia for the superpower era (p. 34).

In this context, the Russia-Ukraine war, which was still ongoing when this study was written, is considered the outcome of a strong belief that

Russia's Kenan's Containment Policy, which constituted the basic doctrinal structure of U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War, still continues. The West's response to Russia's move manifests itself in the form of intense economic sanctions and efforts to isolate Russia from the international system. Due to the intensity of political and social isolation policies towards Russia, Türkiye is one of the few countries where Russia can communicate effectively.

It is absolute that in the modern international system, no actor, including the U.S., can control every point of the global system. In this context, the determination of 'priority areas' is considered to be an extremely important issue in terms of Russian foreign policy. In this context, Russia's military intervention against Ukraine is not only an answer to the determination in question but spreading over a relatively long period of time; it also means that Russia has chosen the first layer of the Eastern European core as its main living space against threats that may come from the West. This choice undoubtedly does not mean Russia has given up on Central Asia. On the other hand, there is certainly a wide field of action in the Turkic World for countries that have adopted macro ideologies as foreign policy rhetoric, especially Türkiye and Hungary. ■