

Book Reviews

Thomas Graham, *Getting Russia Right*, New York: Polity Press, 2023, 259 pp. Index \$25.00, Paper.

Amid the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Thomas Graham's *Getting Russia Right* thoroughly explains Russia's complex history and motives, illustrates the flaws of the American foreign policy concerning Russia since the Cold War's end and presents guidelines for managing relations to reach peace again.

Chapter by chapter, the CFR distinguished fellow and former NSC senior director for Russia, discusses a different aspect of today's US-Russia troubled relations. First, he shows the opposing worldviews that Russia and the US have in essence, emanating from each great power's foundation: Russia was founded under the premise of expanding defensively to survive weather and geographical vulnerabilities, while the US expanded to fulfil the collective idea of finding freedom in a new land. Thus, the Russian positioning in foreign affairs has always concerned control and security interests, while the American goals are connected to ideology diffusion and democratic values abroad.

Furthermore, the figure of Putin is presented as the indispensable Russian leader for a strong, centralized state. Putin's figure is meant to unify a tough land, create multiethnic cohesion through patriotism, manage the oligarchy, emulate and then control the public opinion and monitor existential threats to avoid collapse. In this rhetoric, a pro-Western Ukraine represented a challenge for Russia's plans of building a buffer against Europe and consolidating this strong state defensive of international threats.

Several mistakes are evidenced throughout different US presidential administrations and their foreign policy concerning Russia. Clinton attempted to ignite a free-market democracy in Russia which ended in the ruble collapsing back in 1998 (158). Bush declared war on world terrorism but used double standards when fighting al-Qaida but not supporting efforts to tackle other Russia-declared terrorist organizations (160). During Obama, the Libya intervention left Russia skeptical of the intentions behind foreign interventionism, since a regime change and the murder of Gaddafi was disguised as humanitarian intervention in 2011 (160). These are all illustrated as major missteps for the US-Russia alliance.

Getting Russia Right also introduces guidelines to manage the war in Ukraine. The author advises to focus on prioritizing strategic stability, European security and countering China by engaging a strong Russia, arming Europe for defense and establishing strategic neutrality in Ukraine. A Russia that is strong, stable and allied to the US is convenient for the advancement of the American foreign policy as it can help advance peace in Europe, balance the growing Chinese influence and even create conditions to tackle climate change in the current day.

This book fills a very important gap in the literature as it refrains from blaming Russia as the only cause of numerous tensions in Eurasia, including the current war in Ukraine; and it rather illustrates the complexity of international affairs as they evolved over the years following the collapse of the USSR. The text is innovative because it explains the role of US foreign policy and eastwards ideological expansion in shaping Russia's agenda towards the West. This book

carefully explains how each US presidential administration aimed to democratize Russia and turn it into an ally, instead of giving Russia what it wanted the most; to be acknowledged as one of the great powers.

Something briefly mentioned in the book's epilogue but that could use further discussion, is the role of the Global South and the repercussions the war in Ukraine has in world regions where US foreign policy is conflictive, but the Russian agenda has been more forgiving (204). African countries that remain within their former colonizers' tight influence ratio or Latin American countries that face US-imposed economic sanctions, not only limited to Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua, but also countries like Ecuador and Colombia, are a clear example of state actors looking for counterbalance. Russian soft power strategies include free higher education programs, Russian language courses and medical and agricultural training to create strong Russia-Global South ties. Here, like Graham showed in his argument about the partnership of Russia and China, what unites these countries with Russia is turbulent relations with the US, the hostilities and lack of sufficient opportunities in the global North; and the open window of opportunities that Russia represents. The battle for influencing the Global South is also a crucial part of US-Russia foreign affairs that should not be underestimated.

The analysis' main idea is that Russia views the war in Ukraine through a security lens, justifying its actions as essential for protecting its borders and historical buffers against global threats. In contrast, the US frames it as an ideological battle to share democratic values, considering Russia's moves to be imperialist aggression that don't match American values of freedom and global order. The contrast of safety geopolitics with the contest of ideas defines the conflict's main tension.

Getting Russia Right is an informative and compelling read to avoid repeating foreign policy mistakes. Understanding Russia's origins, its goals and desires; makes negotiation and conjoint policy building feasible for the parties involved. Failing to get Russia right has historically led to hatred, world chaos and war. It is up to future policy makers to understand Russia as a potential ally for the West but always as a power with agency and firm positionings. Doing so properly will lead to a more peaceful future where Western and Eastern worldviews can coexist and even be mutually reinforcing.

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From Words to War: Ukraine in the Russian Press, 2014–2022, Minneapolis: East View Press, 2025, xxxv. 397 pp. Index. \$74.95. Paper.

From Words to War, attempts to highlight the rhetorical and ideological environment in Russia during the years leading up to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. As the publisher's preface explains, the central question guiding the collection is deceptively simple: "what prompted the Russian invasion of Ukraine?" (p. xi) Rather than offering a conventional narrative history

or analytical monograph, the editors assemble a documentary reader composed largely of texts drawn from Russian-language journalism, commentary, and political analysis written between 2014 and 2022.

The premise is the obvious point that the origins of the war cannot be understood solely through diplomatic developments or military events but must also be examined through the narratives, arguments, and rhetorical frameworks that circulated within Russian public discourse during the years preceding the invasion. The preface emphasizes that the volume draws primarily on materials originally published in Russia, many of them appearing in newspapers, online publications, and political commentary outlets in the Russian language, which are presented here in translation to provide readers direct access to the arguments and interpretations that shaped Russian discussion of Ukraine during this period (p. xii). What process they used to select these sources is unstated.

The volume argues, again this seems in retrospect obvious, that the war was preceded by years of rhetorical escalation and narrative construction in which Ukraine's political developments, particularly the events of 2014, were interpreted and reframed within Russian media discourse in ways that increasingly normalized confrontation and later war. The introduction develops this framework further by situating the 2022 invasion within a longer trajectory of tensions between Russia and Ukraine rooted in competing historical narratives, contested national identities, cultural polemics, and disagreements over geopolitical alignment between Russia, Europe, and the broader Western alliance system.

The editors note that although the invasion shocked much of the world, scholars of the region clearly recognized that the conflict emerged from developments that had been unfolding for years, particularly after the Revolution of Dignity in Kyiv (2014) and the subsequent annexation of Crimea. According to the introduction, these events generated an intense debate within Russian political and media commentary, as journalists, analysts, and public intellectuals attempted to interpret Ukraine's political transformation and its implications for Russian interests and identity (p. xvi).

One of the book's central arguments, therefore, is that examining these debates allows readers to understand how a particular narrative of the conflict took shape within Russian public discourse, a narrative that framed Ukraine's post-Maidan government as illegitimate, emphasized Western interference, and portrayed Russia's aggressive actions as defensive or historically justified. To illustrate the development of these narratives, the editors organize the book into six thematic sections that broadly follow the chronological progression of the conflict.

The first part focuses on the upheaval of 2014 and the immediate aftermath of the Maidan protests, presenting Russian media commentary on the collapse of Viktor Yanukovich's government, the political upheaval in Kyiv, and the annexation of Crimea (p. xv). These documents reveal how Russian commentators attempted to interpret the revolutionary events in Ukraine and how early narratives about the legitimacy of the new Ukrainian government began to take shape.

The second part shifts to the conflict in eastern Ukraine, examining commentary on the war in the Donbas region and the evolving political and military standoff between Ukrainian forces and Russian-backed separatists. Here the documents reflect debates about the nature of the conflict, the increasingly destabilizing role of Russia, and the broader geopolitical stakes of the confrontation.

A third section explores the diplomatic and geopolitical dimension of the crisis, including commentary on the Minsk agreements, NATO expansion, and Russia's increasingly confrontational relationship with the West. These texts reveal how the conflict in Ukraine was increasingly framed within Russian discourse as part of a broader geopolitical struggle rather than as a localized regional dispute.

The final part of the volume turns to the period immediately preceding the 2022 invasion, presenting commentary that reflects the increasingly polarized and militarized rhetoric that characterized Russian discussions of Ukraine in the final years before the outbreak of full-scale war. Through this structure, the editors attempt to demonstrate how narratives about Ukraine developed over time and how those narratives contributed to the broader ideological environment in which the invasion ultimately occurred.

From Words to War leaves certain methodological questions unresolved. While the editors emphasize that the documents come from a range of Russian publications and viewpoints, they do not address how specific sources were selected or how representative they are of the broader Russian media landscape, an issue that becomes particularly significant given the dramatic transformation of that landscape between 2014 and 2022 as independent journalism came under increasing pressure and state-aligned narratives gained ever greater prominence.

By presenting contemporary texts rather than detailed retrospective analysis, the volume, valuably, allows readers to observe the language of the crisis as it unfolded, capturing the immediacy and tone of Russian commentary during the years leading to war. Because the editors offer relatively limited analytical framing, readers draw their own conclusions about the relationship between these texts and the broader political structures that shaped Russian media discourse during this period.

Critics of Kremlin policy, including Kirill Rogov, Sergei Medvedev, Lilia Shevtsova, and Tatiana Stanovaya, contribute some of the most forceful and intellectually engaging essays in this edited volume. Their sharply argued interventions supply much of the collection's analytical energy and provide what limited interpretive framework the volume possesses. Vladimir Putin's essay "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians" (pp. 346–63) and his address of February 24, 2022, announcing the "special military operation" against Ukraine (pp. 376–84), although readily available elsewhere in translation, serve as fitting codas to the collection.

From Words to War functions less as a strong explanation of the causes of the invasion than as a documentary record of the arguments, narratives, and assumptions that circulated within (a not clearly delineated) Russian public discussion of Ukraine in the eight years between the Maidan revolution and the full-scale invasion of 2022. Despite its limitations, this volume offers scholars and readers, without knowledge of Russian, a valuable, open-ended, window into the discursive environment from which the war emerged.

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Andrew Hartman, *Karl Marx in America*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2025, 594pp. Index, \$39.00, Hardcover.

Andrew Hartman (Illinois State University) has produced a mammoth study of the image and reality of Karl Marx in America. He outlines from the beginning that there are many images and perceptions of Marx in American history. Hartman even goes as far to say that Marx is a ghost who has haunted both friends and foes alike as they contemplated the American project.

The book is organized chronologically from Marx's own life itself (1818-1883) to the twenty-first century. In this structure, Hartman highlights the influence Marx had in each era for both supporters and critics alike. The author provides a balanced, yet complicated, picture of how and why Marx engendered so much love and hatred simultaneously in an American population that struggled with the impact of industrial capitalism of the nineteenth century through the new century where wars and revolutions turned American society on its head.

For readers of the *Journal of Russian American Studies (JRAS)*, this might not sound like an obvious book for review, but Hartman highlights the key moments where Marx in America was intertwined with events in Russia and the Soviet Union. Prior to the World War I and Russian Revolution era, Marx was influential on the pages the *New York Daily Tribune* where he wrote nearly 500 articles commenting on a wide range of issues in mid-nineteenth century America. Marx's writing in America is a lesser-known side of the German thinker. By the end of the nineteenth century, many native-born and immigrant Americans were tuning into what Marx had to say, even after his death. To some, he was a heroic figure.

Hartman further expands on Marx's influence in America in a Russian context during the World War I period. He analyzed the role of some of his most faithful adherents during this time. He stressed the voice of John Reed, however short it was, as a proponent of Vladimir Lenin's ideas, and by extension Marx's ideas. Other such notable Americans of the era linked to Marx were labor leader and candidate for president, Eugene V. Debs, and the black labor leaders, A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen. All these American writers and leaders had a version of Marx in their heads as they led their own movements for social change in America. Marx, though, said different things to different people. There were other Americans in this era who also advocated for Marx's overall ideological position that received little or no attention in Hartman's book like Lincoln Steffens, Anna Louise Strong, and Albert Rhys Williams.

The Russian theme arose later in Hartman's book coming out of World War II and as the Cold War began. The Red Scare era after World War II reshaped American thinking about the Soviet world and created a fear of all things left-wing left an indelible mark on the American political scene for decades. Hartman focuses much on his attention on American left-wing thinker, Michael Harrington, and his promotion of radical ideas in a time when most Americans were not that receptive to them.

Overall, Hartman's work is a tremendous undertaking. It is well-researched and thoughtfully written in an excellent work that explains one of the most controversial thinkers in modern American life. Like any book, a reviewer could quibble with the focus in certain areas, but the author has done a real service to the reading public by trying to explain who Karl Marx was, how his ideas were

transmitted in America, sometimes through Russian and other intermediaries, and his overall impact on American society. This is an excellent study worthy of a wide readership and a lively debate.

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