

REVIEWS

Rajan Menon and Eugene B. Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order*. Cambridge, MA and London, UK: MIT Press, 2016. 248 pp.

Two major approaches have framed interpretations to the Ukrainian crisis. The pro-European approach blames Russia for its aggression. The pro-Russian one blames the West for encroaching on Russia's Near Abroad and not respecting Moscow's sensitivities. Apart from being implicitly normative in essence, both approaches tend to reduce the complexity of the events to a mere geopolitical competition. This book by Menon and Rumer tries to escape this reductionist paradigm and to explain the context, causes, and consequences of the crisis in Ukraine.

Chapter 1 explores Ukraine's history and its relationship with Imperial, Soviet, and post-Soviet Russia. A brief overview gives some idea of the origins of modern Ukraine; useful geographical maps and data are provided here. Chapter 2 discusses the crisis itself. The detailed analysis in this chapter makes a very important point—namely, that the crisis was not pre-ordained, but was conditioned by a sequence of contingent events and sometimes seemingly irrelevant factors (xvii). One of the most important and interesting details highlighted by the authors here is the flight of President Yanukovich, in an account which challenges one of the most erroneous interpretations positing an “ultra-right” or “neo-Nazi junta” coup in Ukraine (80–81). The fact that Yanukovich voluntarily left the presidential palace and then the country disproves claims that a violent overthrow of power took place. This fact also highlights an important conceptual point for researchers of regime change and democratization. Even though the Ukrainian security apparatus remained largely loyal to Yanukovich, his personal concerns and reasoning became important reasons for regime change in Ukraine. Chapter 3 tries to explain the reasoning behind Russia's annexation of Crimea and support for the anti-government uprising in the East of Ukraine. It describes the process of the growth in Russian resentment over the West's encroachment

into what Russia saw as its sphere of influence, and the emerging concept of the “Russian world,” whereby post-Soviet space is viewed as the habitat of a unique Russia-centered civilization. Chapter 4 looks at Europe, in particular the EU and NATO, as a lens for examining the considerations that shaped European perceptions and policies. The chapter also examines the extent to which the crisis was shaped by the EU’s Eastern Partnership and NATO’s eastward expansion, and how Russia perceived and responded to each of these initiatives. Chapter 5 considers the outlook for Ukraine on the political, economic, and security fronts. The authors develop three scenarios for Ukraine: “frozen conflict”; a Russian invasion; and a Ukrainian victory. Of these three scenarios, the authors correctly identify the frozen conflict scenario as the most likely (146–47). In Chapter 6 the authors argue that the 2014 crisis is about more than Ukraine. The larger lesson of the crisis is that there is no longer a European security architecture that Russia and the West recognize and are prepared to consider as providing rules of the game. The task for Europe’s leaders now, the authors conclude, is nothing less than fashioning a new European political and military order, one that can make crises like the one in Ukraine less likely and more easy to manage through prompt diplomacy (xix).

The book is definitely an interesting analysis of the 2014 crisis. The authors deserve credit and sympathy for taking up the challenging task of writing about a conflagration that is still underway (xv). However, there are several problematic points that could have been removed at the very early stage of conceptualizing the book. The focus of the book is excessively on the analysis of international or high politics issues. The local dynamics is often under-analyzed. As a result, the authors use some formulations that cannot adequately explain the dynamics of the conflict and, consequently, have to stretch the narrative at certain points. This starts with the book’s title, which suggests that the conflict is taking place *in* Ukraine. This is a highly debatable point, because as the authors acknowledge, the crisis has its roots and driving forces not only in the country, but also outside. Both pro-Russian and pro-European analysts have agreed that without the Russian-Western standoff, the conflict in Ukraine would have been of a much lower

scale. Both sides blame one another but have to agree that Europe and Russia were both present inside Ukraine and contributed to the crisis. This means that locating the conflict in Ukraine is analytically problematic. The book would have been far more informative had it overcome the inside-outside border and taken a closer look at the interplay of local and global players on the ground.

In the historical overview the authors are clearly influenced by big geopolitical thinking and tend to miss some important dimensions on the ground. For example, the book does not escape the conventional explanation that attributes the conflict to the traditional “East–West divide” in Ukraine. Even though this conceptualization has been repeatedly disproved, it is again and again imposed on Ukraine. This generalization may be a very handy shortcut for external analysts, making it possible to argue for example that geographic proximity accounts for political loyalty, i.e. that the West of Ukraine is pro-Western while the East of Ukraine is pro-Russian. Furthermore, this explanation for the sake of convenience fuses the pro-European West of Ukraine with its Center, and the allegedly “pro-Russian” East with the South of the country. But this is exactly where this explanation “gets Ukraine wrong.” Even though the authors try to speak about gradation across the various geographic regions of Ukraine (3), their “East–West divide” theory cannot explain why it was that only two small regions out of the vast Russophone space of Ukraine turned into a bloody battlefield. This is where conventional “inter-ethnic conflict theories” fail to explain why the anti-Kyiv uprising took place in a Russophone regional center like Donetsk in the East of Ukraine, but did not occur in similar neighboring centers such as Mariupol, Dnipropetrovsk, or Kharkiv. Nor can the image of the “Russophone and pro-Russian South” explain why thousands of people in the Crimea supported the separation referendum, but in Odessa—another harbor close to the Crimea, and with similarly strong emotional ties to Russian imperial glory and a strong regional identity—most of the population did not support secession. All these phenomena raise the question: does it make sense to attribute any causal power to linguistic or geographic division of the country?

The authors' lack of attention to local dynamics on the ground also leads them into several conceptual and factual errors about the Ukrainian revolution. First, the authors claim that Ukrainian civil society remained passive and allowed Yanukovich to gain power by dismantling the system of checks and balances and imprisoning the leaders of the opposition (54–60). Thinking within this paradigm the authors trace the beginning of the crisis as far as back as the point when Yanukovich refused to sign the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement at the Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit. This is quite an arbitrary generalization. Of course, the Ukrainian public was disillusioned with politicians and did not take to the streets when Yanukovich jailed opposition leaders and dismantled formal institutions of democratic governance; but this does not mean that the Ukrainian public was passive. The Euromaidan did not come out of nowhere. The events that preceded it are not mentioned in this book, yet most researchers of Ukraine would agree that the legitimacy of the Yanukovich regime was already melting in 2010–2012. Several major waves of protests organized by various, often Russophone forces, shook the country while Yanukovich was still negotiating the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement. The book mentions serious economic issues and rampant corruption but does not seem to take these problems seriously enough. Otherwise, the authors would have arrived at a striking conclusion: that no matter which of the two geo-economic projects Yanukovich had selected upon (European or Eurasian), the uprising against Yanukovich would have taken place regardless.

The same problem appears when Russia's role in the crisis is discussed. The authors stress that Russia's move against Ukraine was an outcome of its growing concern about the West's geopolitical assertiveness and response to the crisis in Ukraine (96–99). However, such a "knee-jerk" explanation cannot explain the fact that the Kremlin started its active penetration into Ukraine long before the crisis erupted. It is important to recall that from about 2008 Ukrainian elites—not only the Yanukovich government—allowed Russia to run special active measures on the territory of Ukraine. This created an expectation that Ukraine was not against a reunification with Russia. But this happened much earlier than the

anti-Yanukovich uprising in Kiev. Similarly, the paradigm of rationale choice and strategic analysis cannot explain the situation in Ukraine and Russia's policy choices. For example, the authors argue that after the annexation Crimea can no longer play the role of Moscow's instrument for intervening in Ukraine's domestic affairs (146). Even though one can agree that this tactic was used by Moscow earlier and that the conflict in the East has provided Russia with a substitute form of such leverage, the case of the Crimea is different and unique. The small peninsula plays an extremely important role in Russia's great power identity and from the Russian perspective has hardly been discussed in terms of strategic considerations and rationale choice bargains. The fact that, unlike what has happened in other conflict zones, Moscow immediately annexed Crimea and refused to hold any negotiations on Crimea—despite economic and reputational losses—strongly suggests that in this case Russia's policy in the Crimea was not driven by an instrumental rationale, but by emotion. Similarly, when discussing potential scenarios, the authors use the logic of outcomes: frozen conflict; Ukraine wins; or Russia invades. However, as the history of many crises suggests, things do happen. Countries sometimes sleepwalk into crises without meaning to do so. So, contrary to what the authors suggest, it looks as though the Ukrainian scenario is not going to be similar to the frozen conflict in Transnistria. The main reason is that neither Russia nor Ukraine seems to have given up entirely on violent policy options for dealing with this conflict. Ukraine has managed to rebuild its state structures and its army, and emotions continue to run high over Russia's annexation of Crimea and invasion of the East. On the other side, Russia has not secured the necessary negotiating positions that would allow it to force Kyiv and Europe to accept a new status quo confederative solution for two self-proclaimed republics which would be a safeguard against Westernization of Ukraine. Thus, neither side has achieved its goals and both consider low intensity violent actions to be an ongoing policy option. Consequently, it looks as though scenario "1.5" is more likely: a frozen conflict which might easily escalate into conventional war between Russia and Ukraine. This

means that the situation is in fact far more dramatic, and more dangerous for the world order.

Finally, the authors make two very important points: the crisis was not caused by any internal divisions within Ukraine; but nor was it entirely Europe's or Russia's fault. Nevertheless, even though one can agree that any crisis has multiple causes, this reader would have liked to see these two insightful authors push their analysis a bit further to demonstrate how those various reasons interacted and produced this crisis. Despite these shortcomings, the book represents an interesting piece of analysis that will be useful for professional and broader audiences.

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Ohannes Geukjian, *Negotiating Armenian-Azerbaijani Peace: Opportunities, Obstacles, Prospects*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014. 286 pp.

The term “frozen conflict” was perhaps one of the more blatant misnomers to have emerged from the collapse of the Soviet Union; its complacent implication of predictability had already been largely discredited by the dramatic “thawing” of the disputes in South Ossetia and Abkhazia during the 2008 Georgian War. In Nagorno-Karabakh, the cease-fire between Armenians and Azerbaijanis—in force since 1994—had always been a partial affair, with constant sniper-fire and occasional skirmishes ever more frequently disrupting a precarious silence along the line of contact, before a large-scale outbreak of hostilities in April this year.

That most recent conflagration was a timely reminder of the failure of over two decades of negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Since 1995, these negotiations have been carried out under the aegis of the OSCE Minsk Group, chaired by Russia, the United States, and France; the question as to why, in spite of such long-term great power involvement, the sides to the dispute have not been able to come to an agreement is the focus of Ohannes Geukjian's timely monograph.