

REFERENCES

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Aglaya Snetkov, *Russia's Security Policy under Putin: A Critical Perspective*. London: Routledge, 2016. 254 pp.

As Putin has announced that he will run for a fourth term, uncertainty prevails on the Eurasian landmass. The war with Ukraine has contributed to forging a separate and more distinct Ukrainian cultural and ethnic identity, and the conflict in East-Ukraine lingers on. Russia is still under EU and US sanctions, and an increasing number of Russia's regions are experiencing economic hardships. In domestic politics, protests movements are nipped in the bud, and the virtual patriotism of Putinism grows stronger and more dominant by the day.

Against this backdrop, it seems useful to take stock of the long lines in Russian security and foreign policy. Aglaya Snetkov's *Russia's Security Policy under Putin* (Routledge, 2016) comes in handy as a grand narrative of the shifting foreign and security policies across Putin's three presidential terms. Aided by securitization theory, Snetkov spans a grand-scale analysis of the nexus between foreign and domestic policies, the significance of elite framing of security as a driver in security policies, and how the West is a constant trigger of the increasingly dominant "Russia first" narratives among the Russian elites. The book, which is based on a doctoral thesis, is ambitious in scope, and covers a dazzling array of primary and secondary sources. It is structured in four sections, organized chronologically, thus alluding to a progressive/regressive elite-securitization agenda across the time-

span from 2000 to 2014. Part I-III is dedicated almost entirely to the formative effect of the Chechen wars on Russian security perceptions, and also, the Putin presidency. Part IV, however, scrutinizes the re-securitization of domestic politics and the rise of anti-US patriotism, as well as the diminutive Medvedev intermezzo from 2008 to 2011.

While the book reads fairly well as a whole, I find that the sections vary in quality. The first part of the analysis is detailed and makes use of a large variety of sources, but the focus on Chechnya as a security threat (or “the number one threat”, as Snetkov calls it) to the Russian Federation is in my view taken too far. The case covers 134 pages in the book, and the treatment of the various “strategies” adopted to overcome the challenges to Russian statehood that stemmed from Russia’s military actions against the republic, and also, the phenomenon of international terrorism, becomes somewhat repetitious. Also, Snetkov sees “Putin” not as a politician engaging in securitization (and hence an object of critical analysis), but as elevated above the fabric of securitization. Thus, she keeps repeating phrases like “at the heart of Putin’s ambitions,” Putin “setting Russia on a new course,” and “Putin’s political project.” This latter phrase is all too often linked to assumptions that Putin had “a wider national agenda.” There is no question that Chechnya did constitute a direct challenge to the federal center, but clearly, separatism of all brands could constitute such a challenge to the Russian Federation. The significance of Chechnya was that it was also reinforced by the violent agency of the state, and not some undefined circumstance.

Part IV, which Snetkov calls “2008,” but which in fact covers the period from 2008 until 2014, is in my view better. The critical aspects of the analysis come to the forefront, and the alleged state-saving policies of the Putin administration recede into the background. The dilemmas of modernization and security are placed in center court. In this section Snetkov does not overstate the differences between the Medvedev and Putin administrations, but she contrasts them sufficiently as to accentuate the security dilemma: the Medvedev administration did seek both a modernization dialogue with the EU and a reset with the US, and

his period was, as Snetkov states, “permeated with the language of ‘modernization’ and the need for ‘resets’ in relationships” (p. 160). In his third term, however, Putin brought about the language of anti-Western rhetoric, geopolitical pressure, and the “centrality of power and strength to foreign policy” (ibid.).

Hence, Snetkov holds that domestic circumstances contributed decisively to the sea change in foreign policies after 2012. In terms of continuity, I found it particularly interesting that while Snetkov recognizes Medvedev as a domestic liberal, she holds back on the assessment of the effect of his liberal reform-package delivered at the tail end of his time in office. Quoting Hahn (2013) (but failing to identify whether this is 2013 a) or 2013 b)), she suggests that the reforms offered both “carrots and sticks”: the opening up of political participation, on the one hand, and the continued harassment and stigmatization of the non-systemic opposition, on the other (p. 146). As 2017 draws to an end, this latter statement seems to be more than a vague predication.

The book’s major problem relates to the author’s application of securitization theory. I find that the application of securitization theory to the alleged resuscitation of the Russian state under Putin leaves much to be desired, for two main reasons. First, in some parts, the distinctions between public issue-framing and purposeful action are blurred—as illustrated above, the author returns throughout to Putin-quotes (and also, secondary sources) to demonstrate connections that *should*, frankly speaking, themselves be the object of critical analysis. Second, the core argument of the new wave of ideational analysis was already exceptionally well formulated by Alexander Wendt many years ago: the assumed independent variable of realist analysis—*anarchy*—is really “what states make of it.” To rephrase this, “anarchy” is *operationalized* by states to fit certain strategic purposes; these are again more often than not woven into a web of action and state reasoning around “threats.”

I have read the book thoroughly, but I cannot see that Snetkov in any clear way couples how the “anarchy” of Chechnya is turned into a vision of being a “great power” in global affairs. This insight fades into the background of a comprehensive

narrative of state saving, foreign policy shifts and strong state rhetoric. Also, the securitizing “moves” that would accompany this transition are not made explicit, and hence, the core argument of the Copenhagen school is also treated superficially. As Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde stated already in 1998: “‘Security’ is the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics, or above politics. Securitization can thus be seen as a more extreme version of politicization” (Buzan *et al.*, 1998: 23). Any critical assessment of Russian foreign and security policy should then demonstrate these moves, and exemplify how and why they make the domain of “normal” politics an arena for extraordinary measures. This is not made explicit in Snetkov’s analysis.

True, Snetkov seems to challenge the Copenhagen school in the opening chapter; she applies the insights of the school with the following caveat: “these concepts and theories will not be adopted unquestioningly, but will be reinterpreted in light of the ontological and theoretical assumptions outlined above” (p. 20). What she refers to here is most likely the “non-Western experience” of the preceding chapter, and this experience is variably termed as “culture”, “social cognitive structures” and “identity.” There is nothing controversial in using these terms, but the book does not convincingly cast a light over how these terms align with strategic goals and how they indeed also may serve as a means of “taking politics beyond the established rules of the game,” to use the Copenhagen school’s insights.

This said, the book is a rich account of the changing Russian security perceptions, and also, a valuable source guide for anyone who wants to plunge into the details of Russian security policies. As such, it reads like a purposeful narrative of Russia’s problematic relationship to the West and the country’s search for new status as a great power in IR, and last but not least, as a saga of the purported consolidation of the Russian state under Putin. At the same time, this is why the book also crosses the line over to ontology and normative analysis. As the author states, the book seeks to map “the way in which Putin’s project moved to the next rebuilding stage,” as if assuming that critical constructivism is some sort of

branch of transition studies. Thus, the object of analysis is not how “threats” are securitized and prompt “extraordinary” measures, but how the Russian case unfolds like a well-conceived project for state revival. As the period 2014–2017 has shown, however, this is by no means something that can be taken for granted.

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