



Andrei P. Tsygankov. *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin: Honor in International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. xii + 317 pp. \$99.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-107-02552-3.

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Honor and Two Centuries of Russian Foreign Policy

Russia's relations with the West have always been complicated and prone to misperception. If the West has struggled in determining whether Russia is part of the West, Russia has been equally uncertain how to understand its own fundamental relationship with the West. Meanwhile, over one thousand years of difficult relations between Russia and numerous Western nations (extending back to 988 CE, when Prince Vladimir accepted Christianity) have not cumulated to any lessening of the profound gap that generally characterizes the expectations and judgments of Russian and Western decision makers.

To fully appreciate the Russian *weltanschauung* and related foreign policy actions, we need to take a longer view; a view that extends well beyond the past few decades of Soviet collapse and the reemergence of the post-Soviet Russian state. Many international relations observers understandably bring to their assessments of the Russian-Western relationship a relatively developed knowledge of the Cold War and post-Cold War periods, but they often struggle in assuming a longer-term view. In many cases it is because these observers do not know the rich and nuanced history of Russian-Western interactions. That history is dynamic and complicated and not subject to easy and straightforward conclusions. But it is a history that merits attention as we try to gauge the calculations and behavior of a contemporary Russian governing team that has proven quite savvy and effective in advancing Russian national interest.

Andrei Tsygankov is a student of Russian foreign policy and international affairs who does have a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the Russian-Western relationship, and his expansive knowledge and careful judgment is readily evident in this volume, a volume that is both thoughtful and provocative. Those who have read Tsygankov's other works will not be disappointed in diving into this theoretically interesting and information-rich analysis of important elements that have long driven Russian perspectives and actions. Drawing upon ten case studies that are persuasively developed, Tsygankov surveys more than 200 years of Russian-Western interactions. His analyses are as compelling as they are interesting. In sum, this over 300-page volume provides a *tour d'horizon* of many of the most important Russian-Western foreign policy initiatives and interactions of the nineteenth, twentieth, and early twenty-first centuries. The volume is a must-read for those who desire to understand the Russian foreign policy *weltanschauung*. Its successful integration of Tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet cases reinforces the contention that there is an underlying set of Russian values and points of reference that transcend regime type and era. Because Tsygankov challenges much of the theoretical common wisdom, especially from the realist school, many readers may take issue with some of his judgments and conclusions. But even the skeptical will find his analyses well crafted, well reasoned, and compelling.

Central to Tsygankov's analysis is the concept of

honor in foreign policy behavior, which he argues is core to understanding Russia's perceptions, calculations, and actions. By honor, Tsygankov has in mind the notion of an entity's dignity, its moral compass, and that entity's commitment to fulfilling its assumed moral obligations to itself and to its relevant moral community. He goes on to note that honor "may define a country's stake in the international system and its standards of appropriate behavior," asserting that honor "defines what is a 'good' and 'virtuous' course of action in the international system vis-à-vis the relevant other" (p. 4). Identifying and developing such a concept of honor for a country such as Russia requires considerable knowledge and incisive analysis, but Tsygankov is up to the task.

A review can hardly do justice to the subtleties of honor and two centuries of Russian foreign policy, but the argument advanced in the book is a strong one. Considerable narrative is devoted to illuminating the Russian notion of honor, and the reader is made to appreciate the religious, philosophical, and ethical bases of the Russian understanding. At the heart of Russian honor and Tsygankov's discussion is the strong, socially responsible, state. Also important are values grounded in the Russian cultural-historical experience, Russian Orthodoxy, and even Marxism-Leninism that highly structure the Russian frame of reference and behavioral proclivities (e.g., discernible, long-term commitment to cultural allies). Meanwhile, Tsygankov's careful construction of ten case studies reinforces the power of his theoretical argument.

The volume's case studies include most major Russian foreign policy actions between 1800-2010, with a representative set of cases for Tsarist, Soviet, and even the post-Soviet periods. Many readers will undoubtedly be more familiar with the Cold War and post-Cold War periods, but they are likely to glean new perspectives and some interesting arguments as they consider the early Cold War (1946-49), NATO expansion (1995-2000), the "war on terror" (2001-05), and the Russia-Georgia War (August 2008). Tsygankov argues that Russia has, over time, developed three main postures in dealing with the West: cooperation, defensiveness, and assertiveness. He develops each of these postures in detail, and sets out at least one Cold War or post-Cold War case study to illuminate each. He does likewise with the nineteenth century, setting out at least one important case study tied with each of these three postures. Readers well versed in Cold War and more recent history may or may not agree with Tsygankov's use of this three-category typology in explaining these cases. But they will find his treatments

illuminating, and they may—like me—find themselves occasionally rethinking their interpretation of Russian motivations and actions.

Perhaps because I am a political scientist, not a historian, and more focused on later twentieth and early twenty-first-century international relations and Russian foreign policy, I was especially drawn to Tsygankov's nineteenth-century cases. These case studies include the Holy Alliance (including Russia, Austria, England, and Prussia; 1815-53), the Crimean War (1853-56), and the Recueillement (1856-71). Any Russian specialist or other person who has seen the paintings of Vasily Vereshchagin (1842-1904) or read nineteenth-century Russian memoirs cannot help but be struck by the complexity—and at times, the near impossibility of fully appreciating the "logic" and progression of—these alliances, conflicts, and power relations. Moreover, many, this reviewer included, may not have the time or motivation to tackle the thick histories that require careful study to come to terms with the nuances of Russian-French-English-Ottoman maneuverings or the thinking of Tsar Nicholas I and other Russian decision makers. Yet in tightly constructed, short chapters, Tsygankov makes these cases both accessible and interesting. For example, in an especially compelling analysis, the seemingly illogical Crimean War (1853-56) becomes intelligible and almost predictable as the reader appreciates the Russian sense of honor vis-à-vis the status of the roughly three million Orthodox believers in the Ottoman Empire and Nicholas I's religiosity and commitment to their protection. Where realists might emphasize power considerations and the complicated jockeying among powers, England and France included, the illumination of the Russian concept of honor brings attention to perceived Russian ethical obligations. While Tsygankov does not discount the relevance of power calculations and the balance of power among states, he offers a more complete and satisfying explanation as he factors in decision makers, values and beliefs, and longer-term currents in countries' foreign policy preferences and behavioral proclivities. Since Tsygankov's overriding goal is to illuminate both the notion of honor in Russian foreign policy and Russia's three behavioral tendencies (cooperation, defensiveness, and assertiveness), he organizes his historical case studies by type rather than chronologically. Hence, this is not a Russian foreign policy history text, by any means; each chapter begins and ends with concise theoretical discussions. Indeed, he consistently juxtaposes the realist (and neorealist or neoclassical realist) perspective with a more social constructivist perspective, and the

result is a compelling substantive analysis. Some readers, especially those operating out of the realist framework, may not be convinced by his analysis and discussion. But they will learn much about Russian foreign policy and have their assumptions about international politics and foreign policy well tested.

An especially attractive aspect of this book is its relevance to approaching contemporary Russian foreign policy. Tsygankov's analytical framework and arguments challenge much of the common wisdom about contemporary Russia and its foreign policy calculations and behavior. Cartoon-character stereotyping of President Vladimir Putin and the team that has governed Russia for over a decade do little to help us develop realistic and useful assessments about Russian motivations and actions. With Tsygankov's framework, we can move toward a more realistic perspective and develop more appropriate and accurate assessments. Indeed, when we turn to the all-important Cold War period, we can move past "evil empire" and "demonic Stalin" points of reference to consider Soviet notions of honor, the Soviet emphasis on *rodina* (motherland), and *chest'* (debt of honor). Certainly, more balanced scholarly treatments of the Cold War period have emerged in the past years, and Tsygankov offers an analytical framework to further facilitate this.

With attention to the containment of NATO expansion, the war on terror, and the 2008 Russia-Georgia War, Tsygankov's framework and analysis offer new perspectives that will balance our understanding of these important events. The thinking and actions of President Putin, like Nicholas I, Alexander II, and Joseph Stalin before him, can be approached in a more thoughtful and dispassionate way. I believe the result is a more accurate illumination of Russian calculations and behavior. The reader engages Putin's and twenty-first-century Russia's sense of honor, commitment to safeguarding the Russian

state, and desire to project itself as a part of the West. The 2008 Russia-Georgia War case study is suggestive in this light, especially as its "logic" and unfolding can be juxtaposed with Russia's engagement of the West in the 2001-05 war on terror. These three foreign policy cases reflected differences in Russian calculations and actions, and they yielded different results. But when considered together, the reader gains a much more complete and, I believe, accurate reading of the Putin team's thinking and goals.

Finally, Tsygankov's book does offer some helpful suggestions for Westerners who so often "get Russia wrong," especially in helping Westerners become more realistic and accurate in understanding the Russian perspective and related menu of likely behaviors. In fact, the volume is helpful to Russians, too, as they engage the West. Examples of misjudgment and problematic behavior are found on both sides of the Russian-Western relationship. If Westerners need to acknowledge and honor the Russian worldview, Russians must learn to maneuver through their worldview so as to better understand the West.

Andrei Tsygankov's book is an important and highly welcome contribution to our scholarship on Russian foreign policy and international relations. While theoretically satisfying and highly valuable for its detailed illumination of Russian foreign policy behavior, its contents are accessible and make for a good scholarly read. Overall, the book will have value for all readers who are interested in theories of international relations, while it illuminates an important—yet often misunderstood—global actor. Meanwhile, students of Russia and its foreign policy will find in Tsygankov's volume a theoretical rigor that will help them better analyze Russia's rich engagement of the West.

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