

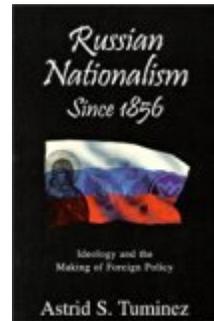
# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Astrid S. Tuminez. *Russian Nationalism since 1856: Ideology and the Making of Foreign Policy*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000. x + 337 pp. \$74.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8476-8884-5.

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## Aggressive Russian Nationalism: Cause and Prevention

Aggressive Russian Nationalism: Cause and Prevention.

In *Russian Nationalism since 1856*, Astrid Tuminez examines the nature of aggressive Russian nationalism in Russian society and its relation to the Russian state at three critical junctures—after the Crimean War, after the Russo-Japanese War, and after the end of the Soviet Union.

Her book will find two appreciative audiences. Students of Russian imperialism, Russian nationalism, and Russian state-building will find extremely enlightening her case studies of aggressive Russian nationalism and her discussion of the nature of nationalism and its relation to state-society relations in Russia. Those interested in foreign affairs will need to consider carefully Tuminez' judgment that the most important factor influencing aggressive nationalist behavior by the Russian state has been the hostility of its international rivals and her conclusion that the most effective way to prevent a nationalistic Russian foreign policy is to avoid actions that would "intensify Russian humiliation and feed Russian paranoia."

In her first two chapters, "The Problem of Russian Nationalism" and "Nation-Building in Russia," Tuminez provides a concise, coherent, and up-to-date survey of research on nationalism in general and on the Russian imperial state. She sets the groundwork for her subsequent analysis by advancing three propositions. First,

she proposes to treat nationalism as a political construct, quoting Rogers Brubaker's idea that the nation is "a cognitive frame" that is used by "political entrepreneurs" to serve the ends of state-building. In other words, nationalism is an ideological tool used by social or state elites for political purposes. (The "real" identity of the Russian people—if such a thing exists—is not at issue.) Second, she holds that the political power of nationalism to create legitimacy for a state derives ultimately from the claim that the nation is the repository of legitimate political authority: "the individual and the state's highest loyalty must be to the nation's core interests or mission" (p. 2). Third, drawing support from Hans Rogger, Richard Pipes, and Geoffrey Hosking, Tuminez argues that the Tsarist regime never attempted to build its legitimacy upon the interests of the nation but upon the imperial power and greatness of the dynasty.

Tuminez points out that since nationalism posits some tie between the interests of the people and the purpose of the state, the Russian imperial state could only regard nationalism with fear and suspicion. Therefore, Russia lacked that "civic access to state authority" through which appeals to national identity can bind the loyalty of the citizenry. Even if the state had wished to use nationalism to build its legitimacy, it lacked the resources. "The imperial government," Tuminez asserts, "could barely afford to feed its soldiers, let alone educate them and inculcate them with nationalist ideas" (p. 38-41).

As a consequence of these considerations, Tuminez argues that Russian “nationalism has been a weak and uneven force in Russia” and only rarely and briefly influenced Russian foreign policy (p. 6). Aggressive Russian nationalism, in her analysis, only influenced Tsarist foreign policy when three factors were operative: “(1) the failure of influential individuals and groups who serve as custodians of collective memory and articulators of prevailing ideologies to redefine the imperial state as the basis of Russian “greatness”; (2) a deep erosion and breakdown of governance, which a) facilitated the efforts of aggressive nationalist entrepreneurs to capture public attention and support, and (b) made a weakened ruling elite vulnerable to the penetration of aggressive nationalist public opinion; and (3) the occurrence of international threats and crises, which intensified nationalist sentiment and augmented pressure on weakened policymakers to take decisive action reflecting an aggressive nationalist agenda.” Tuminez concludes that “Of these variables, threats and crises in the international system have been the most important precipitating factors...” (p. 7).

She demonstrates these assertions with studies of two major cases in which aggressive Russian nationalism was manifested in Russian foreign policy—the influence of Panslavism on the Turkish War of 1877-8 and the impetus of great-power nationalism toward Russia’s entry into World War I. Both of these chapters are thorough, concise, and up-to-date summaries of the scholarship on Panslavism and late imperial nationalism. In them, Tuminez tells a very complex story, noting that Slavophilism and Panslavism showed the awakening of a public discourse and hints at the possibility that a more astute regime could have used this force to create a more stable society but that “the tsarist monarchy was unable to understand this power or find ways to use it for the longer-term consolidation, modernization, and unification (in terms of state-society relations) of Russia” (p. 99).

Tuminez arrives at two conclusions. First, she argues that the aggressive stance taken by Panslavs was the result of national humiliation felt by educated Russians over Russia’s defeat in the Crimean War. Second, she asserts that Panslavism was not, in itself, enough to cause the Tsarist regime to go to war. Instead, the Russian government acted from a feeling of structural weakness in the late 1870s. Its use of Panslavism was not ideologically driven but was merely a means to the end of state power.

Tuminez’ account of extreme nationalism from 1905

to 1914 develops these ideas further. Her foreign policy point, once again, is that the Russian government promoted extreme great-power nationalism both from a sense of weakness (the government was increasingly alienated from its own population) and from national humiliation (beginning with Russia’s loss to Japan in 1905 and ending with its diplomatic failures to support Serbia in the first and second Balkan wars). “Austria’s refusal to give Russia and Serbia any face-saving way out of the crisis contributed to a situation that worked in favor of aggressive nationalist arguments in Russia” (p. 154). This is hardly a new point, but it strongly supports Tuminez’ basic thesis.

Tuminez once again points to a key domestic flaw in the Russian polity and educated society. “In 1914, as in 1878, the prominence of nationalism did not lead to a more enduring unity of government and people in Russia. Although great power nationalism proved a potent ideological instrument for furthering the aims of the imperial state, reality soon revealed its weakness and limitation in forging nation-state cohesion” (p.155).

Although Russian nationalism and Russian imperialism lived on in various forms in the Soviet state, Tuminez is quite right in devoting very little space to the Soviet Union in this book. At the end of Chapter 2, “Nation-building in Russia,” Tuminez gives a succinct summary of Soviet nationality policies. Building on the work of Ronald Suny, Richard Pipes, and Yuri Slezkine, Tuminez highlights the paradox of Soviet nationality policies. At the same time that it preached internationalism and strove to inculcate an imperial Soviet identity (“homo sovieticus” as it was termed in the West) in its citizens, the Soviet Union nevertheless fostered the development of national identity in the Republics and “created a structure and platform from which the most potent attacks yet against the imperial state could be launched” (p. 45). Then, at the beginning of Chapter 5, “Recreating Russia: 1989-1998,” Tuminez surveys the nationalism of Stalin, the internationalism of Khrushchev, and the rise of Russian nationalism in the Brezhnev era.

This very brief treatment of Soviet Russian nationalism is perfectly understandable since the Soviet period doesn’t apply to Tuminez’ analysis. Not only is the internationalist component of Soviet identity extremely problematic, but the Soviet Union never experienced national humiliation of the sort that imperial Russia did. The humiliation was felt only by residents of the Soviet Union’s successor states. Very significantly, however, Tuminez notes that under Communist rule “nation-building was

distorted in favor of service to the state.” “In the end, the Russian ‘Nation’ remained a stunted entity in the Soviet Union, and nationalism did not function to cement state-society relations in a permanent way” (p. 180). One might add that the Soviet regime had the same imperial prejudice as Tsarist Russia against using national identity as its basis of legitimacy.

Perhaps the strongest chapter in the book is Chapter 5, “Recreating Russia: 1989-1998,” a survey of the variety of Russian nationalisms that began to appear in Russia in the waning years of the Soviet Era and that proliferated after the dissolution of the union. Tuminez supplements her usual thorough review of the secondary literature with a wide reading of Russian nationalist documents and with personal interviews with nationalist leaders. Her characterizations of the various strands—“westernizing nationalism,” “nationalism,” “moderate statism,” “aggressive statism,” and “national patriotism”—are nuanced and convincing. This cacophony of nationalist voices is precisely what Tuminez’ analysis would expect. After all, the ignominious withdrawal of Soviet power from Eastern Europe followed by the dissolution of the Soviet Union itself, could be expected to have been even more humiliating to Russian patriots than Russia’s military defeats in the Crimean or the Russo-Japanese wars.

The surprise is that the Russian government has not pandered to the demands of the aggressive nationalists. In Chapter Six, “The Weakness of Nationalism,” Tuminez points out two very optimistic trends. First, she credits Gorbachev with initiating a non-ideological political discourse that set the tone for the government and the mainstream press throughout the nineties. Following Gorbachev the Russian government has deemphasized imperial claims and become more pragmatic. Second, in practice, Russia has followed very moderate policies toward the “near abroad”—Ukraine/Crimea, Kazakhstan, and the Baltics. And even in cases in Georgia, Moldova, and Tajikistan where Russia has intervened militarily, in no case did it attempt to restore Russian imperial control.

In her concluding chapter, “The Future of Russian Nationalism,” Tuminez seeks explanations for this unexpected moderation in two realms—the domestic and the international contexts of Russian nationalism. She is encouraged by the fact that the dissolution of the Soviet Union left the Russian Federation more homogenous and geographically compact and therefore more conducive to nation-building (instead of empire-building). Most importantly, however, Tuminez seeks to substantiate her

argument “...that the international system was a determining factor in the rise and impact of aggressive nationalism in Russia in the past,” (p. 280) by comparing late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russia with late twentieth-century Russia. In the first case Russia experienced a national humiliation, a weak state, an upsurge of aggressive nationalism in society, and a provocative international environment, to which the leaders of the Russian state responded with aggressive nationalist policies. In the second case, she contends, only one of these variables was missing—the hostile and provocative international environment—and the leaders of the Russian state ignored the loud chorus of aggressive nationalists and pursued moderate policies.

It is here that Tuminez offers her foreign policy conclusions. “...Western actors should, as much as possible, give Russia ‘breathing space’ as its people seek to redefine their national identity...by avoiding actions that intensify Russian humiliation and feed Russian paranoia” (p. 283). “...Western actors should continue to engage Russia as a partner or collaborator on many fronts...” (p. 283). On the other hand, in a mild update of the idea of “containment,” Tuminez adds that “...Western policy should not tolerate or justify Russian actions that clearly encourage imperial thought and behavior...” (p. 284).

This is surely a laudable recommendation, but I think that another (and complementary) conclusion is also implicit in her analysis. As I have pointed out already, Tuminez continually raises the question of state-society relations, arguing that neither the Tsarist nor the Soviet regimes attempted to bind society and state together on the basis of nationalist legitimation. She makes it clear that Tsarist Russia was ruled by a hereditary dynasty whose highest value was the glory of its empire; and whose goal was to shore up a rotten and collapsing regime. Even on those rare occasions when it appealed to nationalism, it had in mind its own interests and not those of the people.

Thus the international environment is not the only variable to have changed over the course of the last century. The nature of the Russian state is profoundly different. The only late twentieth-century state that faced incipient collapse and that might have used aggressive nationalism to save itself was the Soviet state, and appealing to nationalism is precisely what Gorbachev declined to do. The leadership of contemporary Russia is made up of elected officials who are trying to build a new state and not trying to defend an old one.

Most importantly, for a whole host of reasons—

because of Soviet nationalities policy, because of Yeltsin's political strategy of "playing the Russian card," or simply because "the nation-state is the agent of modernity"—Russia's new leaders must do what the Tsars and the Commissars did not do, that is, to seek to create a bond between state and society and build state legitimacy on the interests and well-being of the Russian nation. In other words, whether they like it or not, Russia's new leaders must appeal to the majority of Russian citizens and must ignore the loud but few voices of extremism.

Tuminez, herself, points out that the Russian people do not favor aggressive nationalism (p. 202). The simple existence of multi-party elections in Russia (whatever our ultimate evaluation of how "democratic" Russia is) must add an entirely new dimension to Russian politics. There were, of course, no public opinion polls in late Tsarist Russia, but it would not be at all surprising if the overwhelming majority of Russians in 1900 were as opposed to aggressive imperialism as their descendants are a century later. But the Russian state ignored national interest and allowed its policies to be guided by people

who did not have to earn the approval of a national vote.

This is no longer possible, and it would seem that what is limiting the influence of aggressive nationalism in contemporary Russia is not so much international restraint or moderation by Russian leaders, but the anti-imperialism of the Russian people themselves. A conclusion that might be drawn is that the best way to resist aggressive nationalism in Russia is to promote the economic prosperity that seems to be the prerequisite to a healthy civil society. It is rather surprising that Astrid Tuminez, an executive associate at AIG Global Investment Corporation and former consultant to the World Bank, did not make her implicit point more explicit.

Overall, however, *Russian Nationalism since 1856* is a well-researched and well-written book that tells an interesting and important story. As former U.S. Senator Sam Nunn is quoted on the book's back cover, "Policymakers will gain both historical and practical insights from this well-written and thoughtful work." I would add that it will also serve undergraduates as an outstanding survey of the history of Russian nationalism.

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