

# Review of: "Rebuilding a 'Greater Russia' and the Russian Invasion of Ukraine"

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I largely agree with Roger Kanet's perspective on Russia's role in the post-Soviet region. There are two reasons that determine me to share the author's views. First, the paper takes into account the distinct history of the Russian behavior in the Near Abroad, pointing to multiple instances in which Russia did not respect the territorial integrity and invaded other countries. For many scholars of Slavic Studies in the US, the 2022 invasion of Ukraine came as a shock, a wake-up call of sorts. Apparently, many scholars remained myopic to the Russian behavior in the region, considering any talk about Russia's neoimperialism as outdated and too simplistic. This is not the case of Roger E. Kanet. So, I would definitely recommend that the "surprised" academics read this essay to gain a historical understanding of the Greater Russia problem. Much like Kanet, the scholarly communities in Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine, and the Baltic States were always well-aware of the neoimperial tendencies prevailing in the Russian society and its political circles, primarily because the future of their states was at stake. Something, by the way, American scholars of Russia do not have to worry about.

Second, there are many prominent intellectuals in the US, who repeat the Russian narrative and blame the US for the war in Ukraine, claiming that Russia never had any neoimperial plans and that its leaders never intended to rebuild the former empire, "gather the lost lands," and engage in new "liberation" missions. Such lack of understanding is, of course, a result of their limited knowledge of Russian politics as well as a product of their own ideology, whereby America as a global hegemon (i.e. empire) is always described as at fault wherever and whenever a major conflict occurs. In reality, these anti-imperial intellectuals and IR scholars discard the fact that imperialist ideas are quite common around the globe. Russia is but one such example, well-analyzed by Kanet. One could add here China, Britain in the 1940s, France in the 1960s, and Turkey as states, which face or faced the challenge of overcoming their imperial pasts. In this sense, the paper correctly points out that the Greater Russia ideology (the so-called Russian World) predates Putin's regime and was documented in Yeltsin's times as illustrated by the foreign policy concepts advanced by state officials such as A. Kozyrev and E. Primakov.

Drawing on my research, I would add three remarks. One point concerns the hybrid nature of Russia's interventions in Moldova and Ukraine via proxy actors such as parties, media, and oligarchs. This aspect deserves more attention as Russia has not always relied on blunt force but sought for a while to cultivate quietly pro-Russian figures inside the former Soviet republics in the hope that they would rise to power and then play by Moscow's rules. For instance, I was reading that yesterday the Constitutional Court of Moldova banned the Sor Party, one such proxy actor funded by Moscow. Medvedchuk's story in Ukraine is similar.

Another aspect pertains to the multifaceted involvement of Russia in Transnistria. As the author mentioned, Russia fueled the conflict and then deployed its peacekeepers there. In a recent paper, I have also pointed out how Moscow inserted itself in the mediation process, blocking any resolution plans going against its interests.[1] With the Kozak Memorandum, stipulating the federalization of Moldova, Moscow nearly succeeded in achieving a preferred settlement.

Another remark that would strengthen the argument concerns the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Having examined the decision-making process accompanying the annexation of Crimea in detail, I found out that the annexation involved numerous groups some of which remained understudied such as the role of various religious, monarchist organizations. Similarly, the whole Novorossiia plan did not appear out of the blue but was shared by Putin and the members of his inner circle.[2] Moreover, their views of Ukrainians were outright genocidal in the sense that V. Surkov, Putin's advisor on Ukraine, in an interview published in 2019 expressed extremely prejudiced views toward ethnic Ukrainians, which were repeated by Putin in 2022. I will not reproduce them here but if needed I can send the relevant link to the author.

Another fact confirming the general analysis of the author and the existence of long-term imperial patterns is the observation that the Ukrainian authorities and their intelligence sources uncovered at least three Russian attempts to stir a rebellion in Crimea and Donbas prior to 2014.[3] With the benefit of hindsight, it appears plausible that Putin entertained the idea to reach Kyiv and enact a coercive regime change back in 2014 after the Euromaidan succeeded as the Russian troops were at that time positioned along Ukraine's borders much like in 2021-2022. For some reason, in 2014, Putin decided to engage in an exercise of limited territorial expansion and only felt emboldened to invade Ukraine in 2022. But what I found striking is that the same group of people assisted Putin in annexing Crimea, waging hybrid warfare in Donbas and invading in 2022.[4]

In all, I think such papers are necessary in order to elucidate the historical patterns of Russia's behavior in the Near Abroad and to demonstrate that such imperial tendencies preceded the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

[1] Ion Marandici (2023) "Structural bias, polarized mediation and conflict resolution failure: a comparative examination of the disputes in Transnistria and Donbas," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 23:1, 89-113, DOI: 10.1080/14683857.2022.2101188. Free access preprint available here: [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=4426771](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4426771)

[2] Ion Marandici, "Loss Aversion, Neo-Imperial Frames and Territorial Expansion: Using Prospect Theory to Examine the Annexation of Crimea." *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society*, Vol. 8, No. 1, Ibidem Verlag, pp. 111-147, October 2022. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4422688>

[3] Ibidem.

[4] For a detailed discussion of the annexation of Crimea in 2014, see the debate hosted by the Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society. Ion Marandici, "Observations on Prospect Theory, the Annexation of Crimea and the

Second Invasion of Ukraine," Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society, Ibidem Verlag, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 181-189, October 2022, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4468588> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4468588>