Review Feature – The Drivers of Russian Imperialism and War Against Ukraine

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Putin's War on Ukraine: Russia's Campaign for Global Counter-Revolution
By Samuel Ramani
Hurst and Co, 2023

Intent to Destroy: Russia's Two-Hundred-Year Quest to Dominate Ukraine
By Eugene Finkel
Basic Books, 2024

Samuel Ramani's book is divided into ten chapters with the first eight on the 2013-2014 Euromaidan Revolution, and Russia's war against Ukraine from 2014 to the present day. Chapters 8-10 place the war within a global context of Russia's isolation from the West, Moscow's pivot to the East, and Russian attempts to cultivate influence and support in the Global South.

Eugene Finkel's book is divided into ten chapters that analyse the ongoing Russian war against Ukraine within a historical context. The chapters trace Russia's attitudes and policies towards Ukraine from the mid to late nineteenth century and World War I, through the Soviet Union and post-Soviet era. Chapters 7 and 8 focus on the first Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014, and chapters 9 and 10 analyse the 2022 full-scale invasion, Russian military aggression and war crimes. Finkel writes with a deep knowledge of Ukrainian history and politics that is not found in Ramani's book and most other studies of the Russian-Ukrainian War. Finkel integrates Russia's full-scale war within a two-hundred-year Russian campaign to prevent the emergence of, and destroy, Ukrainian identity.

Western Responses to Russia's 2014 and 2022 Invasions of Ukraine

Ramani writes that the primary reason for Russia's first invasion in 2014 was the Euromaidan Revolution, which the Kremlin viewed as a threat to its promotion of illiberalism in Eurasia (p.80). The Euromaidan Revolution was a threat to Russian President Vladimir Putin's revival of Russia as a great power and was seen as a challenge from the US to the Kremlin's domination of a Eurasian sphere of influence.

It is unclear what Ramani (p.76) means when he writes of the 'impact of Western sanctions' on Russia after 2014, as they were weak and had few negative influences on Russia's economy and finances. Ramani does not explain *why* the Western response was weak in 2014 and *why* the West continued business as usual with Russia (as seen, for example, in Germany continuing to build the Nord Stream II gas pipeline). Additionally, between 2014-2021, all Western governments, including the then British Conservative government, were against supplying Ukraine with military aid to defend itself. The Barack Obama presidency (2008-2015) did not apply sanctions to Russia after its 2008 invasion of Georgia and *de facto* annexation of the Georgian South Ossetian and Abkhazian regions. Obama ignored US security commitments to Ukraine, which had been signed in return for giving up nuclear weapons under the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, and he vetoed the US Congress sending military aid to Ukraine. Obama's 'red line' against Syria to halt its use of chemical weapons against civilians was ignored by Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad and in 2015, Russia came to his assistance. Ramani could have analysed these weaknesses of the Obama

administration as a guide to future flaws in President Joe Biden's (who had been his vice president) weak policies towards the Russian-Ukrainian war from 2022-2024.

Ramani exaggerates Western unity in providing military support and imposing sanctions against Russia since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022 (p.381). In fact, there were three camps: the first sought Russia's military defeat (UK, four Scandinavian countries, Poland, three Baltic states, Romania, Czech Republic); the second feared escalation, did not support a Russian defeat, and only provided enough military assistance for Ukraine to not be defeated but insufficient for Ukraine to defeat Russia (US, Germany); and a third incorporated a range of stances ranging from indifference (e.g., Spain), often changing its stance (e.g., France), being weakly committed (e.g., Italy, Spain) to being pro-Russian (Slovakia, Hungary). Turkey was both supportive of Ukraine and at the same time one of those countries re-exporting Western goods to Russia and assisting the Kremlin to undermine sanctions.

Drivers of Russia's Full-Scale Invasion

Ramani outlines the factors that led Russia to launch a full-scale invasion. One of those which Russia claimed was allegedly pre-emptive, to prevent a Ukrainian an attack in the Donbas region, which had no basis in fact. This typical example of Russian imperial innocence; that is, blaming others for its own actions, could have been analysed to a greater extent, rather than simply cite Western media reports. An archetypal proponent of Russian imperial innocence is Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill who, Ramani quotes as saying Russia had never attacked anyone and was only ever defending itself (p.179). Russian claims of imperial innocence have remained a cornerstone of Kremlin disinformation as to why it launched its so-called 'special military operation.'

Ramani writes Russia was confident of a quick victory for its 'special military operation' because it believed the Ukrainian armed forces were a 'depleted force', a sign of poor Russian intelligence on how they had fundamentally improved since 2014 (p.15). In addition, the Kremlin believed the Western response would be weak once more — as it was in 2014. These two factors account for only part of the reason for the initial failure of Russia's 'special military operation.' A third reason, which is not discussed by Ramani, is related to identity questions, with the Kremlin believing Russian imperial nationalist myths of Ukraine inhabited by Little Russians, eager to be 'liberated' from Nazis who had come to power in an 'illegal putsch' in the Euromaidan Revolution. This myth led to failure of the 'special military operation' and its transformation into a full-scale and global war that would generate one million Russian casualties by May 2025, the same month Russia celebrates Victory Day at the end of World War II.

Corruption and the Myth of Russia's 'Second Best Army in the World'

Ramani writes about Russia re-asserting itself as a great power after 'military modernisation,' without sufficiently investigating the roots of why this was a fiction (p.67). Russia claimed its army was the second-best in the world when it invaded Ukraine in 2022, but after three years of full-scale war, we must conclude it is the second-best army in Ukraine.

Eliot A. Cohen and Philips O'Brien provide a detailed study of how Western policymakers, academics, and think tank experts were wrong to believe that Russia's army was the second best in the world and that it would quickly defeat Ukraine. In other words, Western policymakers, academics, and think tank experts held the same mistaken views of Ukraine as did the Kremlin. One major reason, ignored by Ramani and Western policymakers, academics, and think tank experts, is that Russia is a mafia state, as a US diplomatic cable described the country as far back as 2010. Most of the funding for Russian 'military reforms' was in fact stolen, contributing to a chronic inefficiency of the logistical supply chain, a culture of greed and cynicism among officers, insufficient and poor training of soldiers, low quality military technology, and incompetence and weak capabilities of the Russian armed forces and security services.

Russian Imperial Nationalism

Ramani describes how the annexation produced 'nationalist euphoria' in Russia (p.52). Finkel writes that the 2014 annexation of Crimea let the imperialist genie out of the bottle and set in motion Russia's full-scale invasion eight

years later (p.195). When Western governments advised Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko to accept Crimea was forever lost, they were sending a weak signal to Putin and encouraging future Russian land grabs that took place in 2022. Finkel mentions how in 2014, calls for violence were restricted to Russian imperial nationalists, but by 2022, genocidal calls to destroy Ukrainians and torture and kill them had become mainstream in the state-controlled Russian media and in the discourse of Russian leaders (p.214).

Ramani is mistaken to write that opposition leader Alexei Navalny opposed the annexation of Crimea (p.52); unfortunately, he supported it like many in the Russian opposition. Ukrainians have a century-old saying that Russian democracy ends at the Ukrainian border. Ramani points towards the direction of Russia's political evolution but doesn't take this to its logical conclusion, writing that if Putin reconstitutes the Russian political order around an ultranationalist ideology, future scholars could label Russia a fascist state (p.27). I believe, however, that Russia has already transitioned from an authoritarian regime with a collective leadership to in 2020-2022 a fascist dictatorship.

In 2020, the Russian constitution was changed to allow Putin to be de facto president for life. Since 2022, all independent vestiges of media and civil society life were extinguished, and Navalny was murdered in prison. One million Russians have fled abroad. With approximately one thousand political prisoners, Putin's Russia has more people incarcerated for their political views than post-Joseph Stalin Soviet Union. The same is true of the Russian puppet state of Belarus, where there are approximately 1,200 political prisoners. Unfortunately, Ramani's suggestion that scholars would come to describe Russia as a fascist state is not the case as most academics are conservative and are unwilling to quickly change their positions.

Russian Identity and War Against Ukraine

Ramani's discussion of the period between Russia's two invasions (2014-2022) shows a weak understanding of the widening divergences in Russia's and Ukraine's political systems and national identities. On this divergence, which has been taking place since as far back as the disintegration of the USSR in 1991, I recommend Maria Popova and Oxana Shevel's *Russia and Ukraine: Entangled Histories, Diverging States* (2024). Indeed, one of the Kremlin demands in peace talks is for Ukraine to repeal legislation adopted since 2014 on language, education, media, memory politics, and religion.

There is little mention in Ramani's book of why the Kremlin was becoming alarmed at legislation adopted by Ukraine after 2014 in the fields of language, education, media, and identity. Ramani's discussion of the religious crisis in 2018-2019 (p.81) is weak, an area where Finkel has a far greater understanding of its significance for Russian-Ukrainian relations. Moreover, Ramani's discussion of Putin's July 2021 long essay 'On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians', the ideological treatise which underpinned the full-scale invasion eight months later, is too short and perfunctory. Ramani lacks an understanding of why Russians of all political persuasions found it difficult to accept a Ukrainian identity distinct from a Russian one and the concept of a fully independent Ukraine outside the Russian World and Eurasia (pp.102-103).

Finkel, correctly in my view, places identity at the centre of Russia's war against Ukraine. Finkel's main argument is that Russia is undertaking what it has always done under Tsars and Communist Commissars to destroy Ukrainian identity. Russia's violence and military aggression against Ukraine "did not spring into being in 2022" — instead, Finkel claims it is the "product of a two-hundred-year-old history" (p.3). Ramani highlights how, since the mid-nineteenth century, "dominating Ukraine and denying Ukrainians an independent identity, let alone a state, have been the cornerstone of imperial, Soviet, and eventually, post-Soviet Russian policies" (p.3). According to Finkel, Soviet dictator Stalin pursued, and Putin is pursuing, the same goals of destroying Ukrainian identity, language, history, and culture through "time-tested methods of Russian domination over Ukraine and its residents" using 'massacres, deportations, famine, and torture" (p.3). Finkel also writes that Russia is simply doing what it always has done – murdering, looting and destroying identities (pp.223, 257). Anne Applebaum's*Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine* (2017) similarly argued that Stalin and Putin were both obsessed about 'losing' Ukraine.

Russia's Invasion Goals

Ramani's analysis of Russia's two goals in 2022, of 'de-nazification' and 'de-militarisation' is not compelling (pp.125-126). This is unfortunate because first, the goals were long-standing and go back as far as President Dmitri Medvedev's 2009 open letter to Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko; and second, they provide an insight into the identity roots of the war. Russia's 'de-nazification' goal was – and remains – to annex what Russian imperial nationalists call 'New Russia' (southeast Ukraine), and after genocidally destroying Ukrainian identity, create a smaller Little Russian entity as a Russian puppet state. Little Russia's domestic policies on education, language, culture, and religion would resemble those undertaken in Belarus since 1994 by Alexander Lukashenka, a president nostalgic for the Soviet Union and accepting of his country's status as a White Russian province and Russian puppet state. Russia's goal of 'de-militarisation' would permit Little Russia to only possess very small 50,000-strong armed forces with a Kremlin definition of 'neutrality' forever ruling out membership of NATO and the EU.

Finkel believes this is Russia's war and genocide — not just Putin's war against Ukraine. I agree with this premise, but this is an area that remains surprisingly contested. The two leading academic studies which uphold Finkel's premise of the Russian people supporting the war against Ukraine are Jade McGlynn's *Russia's War* (2023) and Ian Garner's *Z Generation: Into the Heart of Russia's Fascist Youth* (2023). Russian liberal oppositionists, such as Vladimir Kara-Murza and Yulia Navalnaya, academics Mark Galeotti and Keith Gessen, and *Economist* Russia and East European Editor Arkady Ostrovsky disagree, claiming Russians do not support or are indifferent to the war, and that this is Putin's war against Ukraine. Ukrainians agree with Finkel, McGlynn and Garner — the Russian people support the war against Ukraine.

After the first invasion in 2014, most Ukrainians were negative towards Russian leaders and the Russian state — but not towards the Russian people. After the full-scale invasion in 2022, most Ukrainians became negative towards both the Russian people and Russian state. Indeed, 93 and 84 percent of Ukrainians respectively hold negative views of the Russian people and the Russian state, with only 8 and 3 percent respectively holding positive views. Russia's full-scale invasion and war crimes brought about the greatest changes among eastern and southern Ukrainians, who became highly negative towards the Russian people and the Russian state.

Russia Loses Soft Power Influence in Ukraine

Finkel does not analyse how the disintegration of the Party of Regions and banning of the Communist Party of Ukraine led to the marginalisation of pro-Russian political forces and pan-Russian identity after the Euromaidan Revolution. Legislation on education, media, education, religion, memory politics, foreign and security policy adopted during Poroshenko's presidency (2014-2019) reinforced the growing domination of Ukrainian identity distinct from Russian. Russia's full-scale invasion aimed to halt what it viewed as Ukraine's permanent break from Russia.

In 2018-2019, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew I removed Ukraine from the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church, under which it had been since 1686. The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople also issued a *Tomos* for autocephaly (independence) for the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. These two steps produced earthquakes in the Kremlin, with Putin calling an emergency meeting of the Russian Security Council. Importantly, Zelensky, after being elected in a landslide in 2019, double downed on these policies adopted under his predecessor, supporting legislation condemning Russian colonialism, genocide and de-nationalisation of Chechens, Crimean Tatars, Circassians and Ukrainians in Russia; closing five TV channels financed by the Kremlin; banning twelve political parties with ties to Russia; and opening criminal charges against Viktor Medvechuk, Putin's closest ally in Ukraine.

Russian Historical Myths Driving Military Aggression

The biggest myth driving Russia's war against Ukraine is that Russians and Ukrainians constitute 'one people', which Putin, the Kremlin, Russian leaders, and state-controlled Russian media repeat ad infinitum. This myth is the basis for Russia claiming a right to rule Ukraine and the right to decide how Ukrainians should think and act. Finkel writes that Russians perceive Ukrainian defiance and the pursuit of an identity distinct from their neighbour as 'betrayal', which leads to punishment, destruction, and murder (p.12) . He also highlights that when Russia's so-called 'special military operation' failed to defeat Ukrainians in a few days, the Kremlin changed its goal to destroying

Ukraine. Finkel goes on to suggest that Putin decided to teach Ukraine a lesson by subjugating and forcefully returning Ukrainians to the fold of the Russian World (p.211).

Putin's imperial nationalistic claim of Russians and Ukrainians constituting 'one people' has no basis in historical facts and contradicts Soviet recognition of a separate Ukrainian people and language. This is ironic because Putin has a deep nostalgia for the USSR. From 1922-1991, Ukraine was one of fifteen republics in the Soviet Union and a UN member (Stalin negotiated three UN seats for the USSR, Ukraine and Belarus).

Denying a separate Ukrainian people requires Putin and the Kremlin to return to the pre-Soviet era when the Tsarist Empire banned the Ukrainian language in the 1863 'Valuev Circular' and 1876 'Ems Decree' and adopted and defined the 'Russian people' as comprising great Russians (Russians), little Russians (Ukrainians), and white Russians (Belarusians). This chauvinistic myth was kept alive by Russian emigres after the anti-Bolshevik 'Whites' had been defeated in the early 1920s, who later escaped abroad. Unfortunately, Ramani and Finkel do not discuss the return of White Russian émigré writing and thinking, such as the pro-fascist and Ukrainophobe Ivan Ilyin who became Putin's favourite author. White Russian emigre denial of a Ukrainian state and a Ukrainian people was taken on board by Russian leaders, who diffused this thinking within the state apparatus, armed forces, and education system, thereby providing the ideological driver for Russia's full-scale war.

Finkel believes Russia's full-scale invasion was a product of a historical legacy that his book extensively analyses, as well as the Kremlin's inability to implement Russia's version of the 2014-2015 Minsk Accords that would have transformed Ukraine into a Little Russian puppet state, the growing influence of imperial nationalism in Russia, and Putin's isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic (p.212). He writes that Putin's infamous July 2021 essay on 'The Historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians' draws on the same ideology as that of the Club of Russian Nationalists in the late Tsarist Empire (pp.162, 214).

Although they are a century apart, the Club of Russian Nationalists and Putin's Russia have four commonalities. First, they both deny the existence of a Ukrainian language. Second, they both arbitrarily divide Ukraine into anti-Russian Ukrainian elites and pro-Russian Ukrainian people. The Club of Russian Nationalists called anti-Russian Ukrainian elites 'Mazepists' (followers of Hetman Ivan Mazepa who led an uprising against Russia in 1709), while Putin's Russia calls them 'Nazis'. Third, both believe the Ukrainian nationalist movement was artificial and supported by outside conspiracies, whether Austrians and Germans (Club of Russian Nationalists) or Western clandestine services like those of the US and EU (Putin's Russia).

Fourth, Russian imperial nationalists in the Tsarist Empire and Putin's Russia have used violence to destroy the Ukrainian language, monuments, and national symbols. In Crimea and southeast Ukraine, the Russian occupation authorities are destroying Ukrainian books in libraries and schools, introducing new Russian school curriculums to Russify and Sovietise Ukrainian children, looting museums, installing Russian and Soviet flags, tearing down Ukrainian monuments, and re-installing monuments of Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin. Finkel writes that the goals of the Club of Russian Nationalists were, and Putin's Russia remains, to transform Ukraine into the mythical Little Russia (p.212). This historical depth to Russia's goals and war against Ukraine, which Finkel analyses so well, is absent in Ramani's and most other books on the Russian-Ukrainian war.

The Myth of Russians and Ukraine Constituting 'One People'

In 2016, the installation of a huge monument to Grand Prince Volodymyr of Kyiv Rus next to the Kremlin was meant to strengthen Putin's myth of Russians and Ukrainians constituting 'one people', traced back one thousand years to the Kyiv Rus state. And yet, Rus and Russia in fact have nothing to do with each other; the term Russia only came into being in 1721, when Peter I changed the name of Muscovy to the Russian Empire. Grand Prince Volodymyr ruled Kyiv Rus in 978-1015 before Moscow came into existence in 1147, just ahead of the Mongol destruction of Kyiv Rus in 1240. The Soviet regime celebrated Kyiv's 1500th anniversary in 1982, making it 600 years older than Moscow and 1,200 years older than St. Petersburg.

Finkel writes that decades before Putin articulated these views, Russian nationalist dissidents like Alexander

Solzhenitsyn claimed Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians constituted 'one people', and alleged that Ukraine's borders were artificial and Ukraine included historically 'Russian' territories in Crimea and the southeast of the country (pp.159, 163, 165). Solzhenitsyn called for a Russian Union of the three eastern Slavs to replace the Soviet Union, which is like the concept of 'Holy Rus' propounded since the 1990s by the Russian Orthodox Church. Finkel continues that Solzhenitsyn and Putin both expressed concern for millions of Russians and Russian speakers stranded in Ukraine after the USSR disintegrated in 1991 (pp.158, 163).

Paul D'Anieri's *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilized Divorce to Uncivil War* (2019) analyses how Russia has had difficulty in accepting Ukrainian independence throughout the period since the USSR disintegrated in 1991. Finkel highlights how Boris Yeltsyn, usually touted as a democratic Russian president, was uncomfortable with the notion of Ukrainian independence, and members of his team threatened to challenge Ukraine's borders (p.157). Finkel quotes an adviser to Gorbachev, who made irredentist claims declaring Crimea, the Donbas and southern Ukraine as "historical parts of Russia" (p.158).

Russian and Western Historians in the Service of Empire and Imperialism

My book, Crisis in Russian Studies?, showed how Western historians of Russia use a Russian imperial nationalist historical framework, resembling that found in histories published in Putin's Russia. Historians in Putin's Russia and Western historians of Russia both monopolise Kyiv Rus as the first 'Russian state', and after its demise in 1240, transfer its legacy to Vladimir-Suzdal, Muscovy, Russian Empire, USSR and the Russian Federation.

Finkel writes that Putin's Russia is monopolising Kyiv Rus even further, with Russian history textbooks referencing only Rus, with Kyiv removed, and claiming that Grand Prince Volodymyr was baptised in 'ancient Rus', not Kyiv Rus (pp.230-231). Putin's Russia's draws on the policy of the Soviet Union which only permitted Russian historians to write and research about Kyiv Rus. The Soviet Union celebrated the millennium of Christianity adopted by Kyiv Rus in Moscow, not in Kyiv — even though Moscow did not exist in 988.

Historians in Putin's Russia and Western historians of Russia also marginalise Ukrainians by *de facto* defining them as squatters on 'Russian' soil in Kyiv Rus. These historians depict Ukrainians as 'younger brother' appendages in their histories of Russia. The belief that Ukrainians and Russians are very close was prevalent among European scholars and policymakers through to the 2003-2004 Revolution, and even the Euromaidan Revolutions. In the late 1990s, Ukrainian Ambassador to the Benelux countries, Borys Tarasyuk, complained to me how the European Union was linking Russia and Ukraine's fates, with Eurocrats telling him that Ukraine could not join the EU without Russia. Brussels only changed its approach in 2010 when the EU launched the Eastern Partnership.

Many historians largely ignore Ukrainian historians who have been writing histories of Ukraine separate to Russia since the late nineteenth century. Ukrainian historiography transfers the legacy of Kyiv Rus to the Galician-Volhynian Kingdom, and from there to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Ukrainian Cossack states. When Ukrainians and Muscovites met in the mid-seventeenth century, they held different world views and used interpreters, pointing to them not being 'one people'. Finkel critically engages with the imperial nationalist claim that Ukrainians always sought 'reunification' with Russians because of a common origin, language and religion (pp.35-37).

Historians in Putin's Russia and Western historians of Russia write about Russia as an empire; there are no Western histories of the Russian Federation as a nation-state. In contrast, Ukrainian histories use similar frameworks as European and North American histories, incorporating all the events that have taken place on the territory and peoples who have lived on the territory of Ukraine. Kyiv Rus primarily existed on Ukrainian land and is therefore described by Ukrainian historians as the first Ukrainian state. Historians in Russia and Western histories of Russia instead describe Kyiv Rus as the 'first Russian state.'

The USSR had deliberately merged Soviet and Russian identities by privileging Russians as the 'leading people' and 'elder brother'. The Soviet Russian republic was the only one of fifteen republics to not possess its own republican institutions, such as a branch of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In late 1991, Yeltsyn took control of Soviet institutions in Moscow, and these later became Russian Federation institutions. With history playing such a

prominent role in the Russian-Ukrainian war, Finkel points out how Russian imperial nationalist mythology influenced contemporary policy making (p.168). In the mid-1990s, before Putin became president, only 29 percent of Russians were respectful towards the borders of the Russian Federation, and only 17 percent believed Ukrainians and Russians were different peoples.

Consequently, Russians hold an identity that imagines 'Russia' to be bigger than the Soviet Russian republic and Russian Federation. Finkel writes how in the 1990s, Russian liberals did not develop a post-imperial civic identity for the Russian Federation (p.267). Due to this, Finkel believes Russian liberals failed the litmus test of dealing with the 'Ukrainian question' by ceding the definition of Russian identity to imperial nationalists, and thus they failed to counter imperialist and nationalistic perceptions of Ukraine as an illegitimate entity (p.267).

Russia and the Anti-Western Axis of Upheaval

The subtitle of Ramani's book, *Russia's Campaign for Global Counter-Revolution*, promises more than is delivered in the last two chapters, which deal with the global impact of the war. There is insufficient analysis explaining why Putin views the 'special military operation' against Ukraine as a wider war against liberalism, the 'collective West', NATO, the US-led unipolar world, and the perfidious 'Anglo-Saxons.' Why do the Kremlin and Russian imperial nationalists believe an artificial Ukraine and non-existent Ukrainian identity are propped up by the West as an 'Anti-Russia'? Why was a supposed great power – Russia – with the 'second-best army in the world', forced to go hat in hand to plead for drones and missiles from Iran, and military equipment and troops from North Korea? Ramani's book also does not investigate China's role as the main external enabler of Russia's military machine.

Furthermore, Ramani's discussion of Israel does not explain why it refused to militarily support Ukraine, a country led by a Jewish president whose family was murdered in the Holocaust (pp.351-353). Why has Tel Aviv not understood the ramifications of Iran's military cooperation with Russia, up to and including receiving Russian technology to build nuclear weapons? Why does Tel Aviv not understand that Israel and Ukraine are natural military allies because Iran and Russia have the same goals to destroy them? These are the many questions which Ramani could have answered in these last two chapters dealing with the global ramifications of the war.

Conclusion

Ramani's book falls into the same pitfalls as many books published after Russia's two invasions of Ukraine. The book lacks a theoretical framework, cites few academic sources, and is over-reliant on Western media sources. Importantly, the book includes little analysis of national identity in the Russian-Ukrainian war, and yet — as Finkel convincingly shows — this question, along with Russian imperial nationalism and messianism, are the drivers of the Kremlin's war against Ukraine. In addition, Ramani also does not analyse why the war spread from Russia and Ukraine to a global war.

Moreover, Ramani's over-reliance on Russian sources is another example of academic orientalism; that is, viewing Ukraine through the eyes of the colonial power (in this case, Russia). Ramani's book cites nearly 500 Russian sources and only 50 (primarily English-language) sources from Ukraine. The book therefore continues in a line of academic orientalists since 2014 who have written about the Russian-Ukrainian war who do not use a balanced mix of Russian and Ukrainian sources. For example, Richard Sakwa's *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands* (2015) was one of the first classic books dominated by Russian sources that cited Putin thirty-one times but never once Ukrainian President Poroshenko. Gerard Toal's book *Near Abroad: Putin, the West, and the Contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus* (2017) cited Gorbachev twice and Poroshenko only once!

An essay or thesis on the Russian-Ukrainian war submitted by an MA or PhD student would receive an F grade if it were dominated by Russian sources, with the only Ukrainian source the English-language *Kyiv Post*. When writing their own books, Western academics should surely practice what they preach to their students.

In placing Russia's objectives within a historical context, Finkel's book is an important contribution to our understanding of the roots of the Russian-Ukrainian war. I would therefore recommend Finkel's book for academic

syllabi in the areas of Russian-Ukrainian relations, national identity and nationalism, war studies, and international relations. Finkel understands the root causes of the war; sadly, Raman and many others who have written on this subject do not.

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