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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State by Mark R. Beissinger

Review by: Roger D. Petersen

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typically achieved by modernizing sections of the elite guided by a vision of the way that the country in question needs to change to enhance international economic and strategic competitiveness. Did Gorbachev's moderates really have such a clear strategic purpose? The very fact that Hahn identifies eight "conjunctures" in the development of perestroika suggests otherwise, a permanent war of position by an embattled but essentially reactive reformist group (which itself fragmented). In addition, Hahn's model rather marginalizes, in theoretical terms, the role played by the "revolution from below." Above all, Hahn challenges the existing wisdom that argues that the exit from communism in the USSR was not accompanied by pacting; on the contrary, Hahn argues, the Novo Ogarovo process on refounding the Union was a transition pact that could well have opened the way to full-scale democracy if not ruptured by the attempted hardline coup of August 1991.

The final chapter on post-Communist Russian developments, it must be stressed, represents a dramatic decline in the quality of empirical evidence and the coherence of argumentation. It is little more than a superficial *tour d'horizon* condemning the Yeltsin regime for a multitude of sins. It is unclear why this chapter was included at all since it adds little to the debate, and reveals the limits of Hahn's methodology rather than illustrating its applicability to the broader process of transition in Russia. The value of the book, moreover, is undermined by perhaps the worst copy-editing that I have ever seen; it appears that the text was simply not proof-read adequately. Nevertheless, Hahn's work is undoubtedly a must read for anyone interested in Gorbachev's "revolution from above."

Richard Sakwa, University of Kent at Canterbury

Beissinger, Mark R. *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002. xvi + 503 pp. \$80.00. ISBN 0-521-80670-4.

Mark Beissinger's book is the most complete explanation so far of how the collapse of the Soviet Union went from "the impossible to the inevitable" in the short span of a few years. The work has both a substantive and a theoretical agenda. Substantively, Beissinger takes on a number of "conventional wisdoms." He challenges approaches that see the collapse of the USSR as structurally foreordained; he contests the view that certain individual-based factors, for instance Gorbachev's personality or Yeltsin's decisions, were most crucial in the disintegration of the Soviet state; he challenges the thinking that a higher willingness to repress would have kept the Soviet state afloat.

Beissinger confronts these common beliefs through a sophisticated theoretical framework developed in the first chapters. In an effort to deal with the interplay between structure and agency, he advances a theory of nationalist mobilization founded on "tidal forces"—multiple waves of nationalism that influence one another. On its face, this idea hardly seems new, especially in terms of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Obviously, the independence movements in the Baltics and Eastern Europe influenced various nationalist movements that followed. Beissinger, however, develops this concept to an unprecedented degree.

Beissinger points out that a few key general variables apply to all nationalist movements: structural facilitation, institutional constraint, and event-generated influences. He then goes on to show which of these factors was most crucial early in the "tidal wave" and which played their role later on. He convincingly shows that there is no isolated, single path to successful nationalist mobilization. While "early riser" nations depend on favorable structural conditions, "late risers" can compensate for structural disadvantages by substituting event-generated influences. In effect, late risers build off the successes of other nations who mobilized earlier in the wave.

Because of his massive data base (the data set includes 6,663 protest events and 2,177 violent events that occurred between 1987 and 1992), Beissinger can test fine-grained hypotheses and isolate the effects of certain variables. For example, common sense may tell us that overall population size and level of linguistic assimilation probably play significant roles in producing nationalist

mobilization. Beissinger's method and data are able to specify key thresholds for population numbers and tell us the stage of mobilization when linguistic assimilation becomes most important.

There are obvious potential criticisms of this type of large-n research. For instance, a statistical analysis of thousands of events may obscure the critical importance of single events. To take one case, the failure of the regime to follow through on the January 1991 crackdown in Lithuania undoubtedly provided more key information than the vast majority of other events. Furthermore, this method will not be able to pick up more nuanced effects of political culture. Beissinger notes that events mutually influence one another and become "waves" in part because individuals reason by analogy and also because nationalist elites in the various regions of the USSR communicated with one another. It would seem that the analogies one draws might be constrained by one's historical and cultural background and that communication across regions might be affected by personal networks and ethnic affinities. To Beissinger's credit, he attempts to address many of these issues through case studies and process tracing. There is a clear effort to make the material accessible and interesting to the widest possible audience. It is noteworthy that in such a data-filled book, Beissinger selects quotes from Foucault, Bordieu, Herzen, de Tocqueville, and Shakespeare to head various chapters.

Perhaps those scholars stressing agency and institutional choice will be most critical of this work. Although Beissinger sets up his framework by stressing the interplay of structure and agency, in the end, structure seems to do most of the heavy lifting. For example, Beissinger notes that when tidal forces operate, events move faster than the ability to develop new institutions. The speed of change creates "thickened history," which itself becomes a heavy constraint on the range of decisions actors are able to conceive and act upon. In the end, the wave itself, rather than the actors caught up in it, appears to drive the outcome.

As Beissinger states in the acknowledgments, this book was thirteen years in the making. It was time well spent. The work will undoubtedly engage a variety of scholars for some time to come.

Roger D. Petersen, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Nizameddin, Talal. *Russia and the Middle East: Towards a New Foreign Policy*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000. vii + 296 pp. \$49.95. ISBN 0-312-22538-5.

This book focuses on Russian foreign policy toward the Middle East during the Yeltsin era. After an overview chapter on Soviet foreign policy toward the region from 1945 to 1948 and one on Gorbachev's foreign policy toward the region, there are detailed chapters examining Yeltsin foreign policy toward Israel, Israel's neighbors, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, and Turkey and Iran. In addition to Russian press sources and secondary Western ones, the author drew upon interviews with Russian officials and scholars, Arab officials who have dealt with Russia, Egyptian government archives, and articles by (or interviews of) Russians in the Arab press.

What emerges is a highly nuanced account of different Russian viewpoints (the author identifies five principal ones) toward the Middle East under Yeltsin. Although the author clearly favors the Arab side in the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, he offers shrewd assessments as to why Moscow viewed various Arab actors negatively, and vice versa. Nizameddin points out repeatedly that while some in the West viewed Primakov (in his capacity of Yeltsin's foreign minister and then prime minister) as hostile toward the U.S., the Arabs came to understand that he was never prepared to risk Russia's ties with Washington in order to support them.

While the author provides a balanced assessment of Russian policies toward the region, he does not always do so regarding the policies of each country in the region. Nizameddin especially disapproves of Saudi Arabia's close alliance with the U.S., referring to the Kingdom as Washington's "client state" and stating that "Although the Saudi government would have probably preferred a