

The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters

Volume 52
Number 1 *Volume 52, Number 1 (2022)*

Article 13

Spring 3-9-2022

In the Spotlight: Dealing with the Russians

Andrew Monaghan

Follow this and additional works at: <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters>



Part of the [Defense and Security Studies Commons](#), [Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons](#), [Military History Commons](#), [Military, War, and Peace Commons](#), [Other Public Affairs](#), [Public Policy and Public Administration Commons](#), [Political History Commons](#), [Public Affairs Commons](#), [Strategic Management Policy Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Andrew Monaghan, "In the Spotlight: Dealing with the Russians," *Parameters* 52, no. 1 (2022): 157-159, doi:10.55540/0031-1723.3136.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by USAWC Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters by an authorized editor of USAWC Press.

Book Reviews

SPOTLIGHT ON RUSSIA

Dealing with the Russians

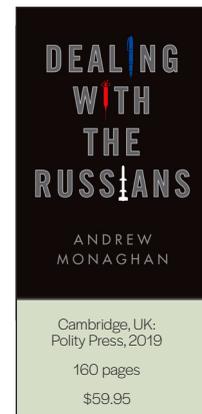
By Andrew Monaghan

Reviewed by Dr. Bettina Renz, professor of international security,
School of Politics and International Relations, University of Nottingham

Andrew Monaghan's book, *Dealing with the Russians*, begins with an unambiguous warning: "so let us be clear from the start: Russia poses a major challenge to the Euro-Atlantic community. This challenge is serious and there should be little doubt about it" (10). Moscow's aggression against Ukraine, ongoing since spring 2014, demonstrates Vladimir Putin's willingness to violate the most fundamental tenets of international law. The string of hostile actions that followed set Russia on a collision course with the United States and its allies. Russian military operations in Syria breached international humanitarian laws and risked the escalation of tensions. Active measures, most prominently interference in the 2016 US presidential elections, targeted democratic processes in western states. In response to these aggressions, the Euro-Atlantic community adopted a series of measures for dealing with the Russian threat, such as reinforcing NATO's posture (especially in Eastern Europe), imposing economic sanctions, and securing itself against various hybrid threats.

In his cogently written and argued book, Monaghan diagnoses why the Euro-Atlantic community's efforts to date have failed to constrain Moscow's aggressive behavior. He argues although the community clearly agrees about the severity of the challenges faced, the exact nature of the threat remains inadequately understood. The United States and its allies lack a coherent strategy, which is essential for dealing with Russia in the long term. To devise a successful strategy, the United States and its allies will need a detailed understanding of Moscow's foreign policy.

In the chapter "(Mis)Interpreting the Russian Threat," Monaghan discusses how the uncritical use of historical analogies like the "New Cold War," the fixation on questionable abstractions like hybrid warfare or A2/AD, and especially essentialist assumptions about Russian expansionism have become a "trap for thinking" in the West (40). The resultant view of Russia lacks nuance and does not accurately reflect the country's foreign policy motivations, which are far more



complex than the current focus on potential challenges to Euro-Atlantic security suggests. The chapter “From Dialogue to Deterrence” demonstrates how a crude understanding of contemporary Russia has hindered the identification of policies suitable for handling the complex problem. Responses like economic sanctions or NATO reinforcements in Eastern Europe are reactions to individual events rather than elements of a coherent strategy.

Monaghan argues the perceived dichotomy in Western discourse of either deterrence of, or dialogue with Russia, is particularly unhelpful. Can deterrence work if it is based, at best, on a partial understanding of the Kremlin’s motivations and capabilities? Can dialogue work without a nuanced understanding of the nature of current tensions, including an appreciation of how the Kremlin’s views of the United States and its allies have influenced its actions over the past few decades? Neither deterrence nor dialogue are a panacea or an end in itself. As Monaghan states, “success in both will be the consequence of a coherent broader strategy” (85).

Dealing with the Russians provides food for thought for readers seeking a better understanding of the current crisis in relations between the West and Russia and possible ways forward to prevent tensions from spiraling. Above all, the book is explicitly relevant for Western policymakers and decisionmakers developing future policies vis-à-vis Moscow. Monaghan’s work, based on extensive personal experience collaborating with policymakers and military practitioners, is a plea to take the Russian challenge seriously. Doing so, however, means more than hawkish political statements or the adoption of measures in reaction to individual events.

In the concluding chapter, Monaghan outlines systematic efforts required, in his view, to create a coherent future strategy. There is no quick-fix solution. Instead, a serious investment in reinvigorating the Russian studies community is required to regain the linguistic skills and country expertise lost since the end of the Cold War. This focus should not be too narrow. A holistic understanding of contemporary Russian foreign policy needs to draw on interdisciplinary insights from history, politics, sociology, and economics. Institutional partnerships able to coordinate knowledge exchanges between researchers—academics, think tanks, and independents—and relevant state structures also need to be strengthened. Most importantly, concerted effort is required to confront and challenge groupthink in policy- and decision-making circles, such as the ongoing fixation on hybrid warfare, which has been comprehensively debunked by Russian military experts.

The United States and its allies have failed to devise a coherent Russia strategy not only because of persisting “narrow, abstract and clichéd” views of Russia, but also because these views have been “impervious to ‘reasonable

challenge’” (92). Policymakers and decisionmakers in the West willing to have their views challenged in the name of devising a future grand strategy for Russia should read Monaghan’s book.