Marina Lebedeva, *Russian Studies of International Relations: From the Soviet Past to the Post-Cold-War Present* (Stuttgart: ibidem Verlag, 2019).

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Marina Lebedeva’s book, *Russian Studies of International Relations*, provides a clear and succinct description of how Russian experts have analyzed and written on international relations topics. Lebedeva teaches in the Department of World Politics at Moscow State Institute of International Relations University and is a prolific contributor to that Russian discourse, giving her a front row seat to the evolving views of Russian experts.¹

The book is divided into two sections. The first section describes the foundations and evolution of Russian thinking on the place of the Soviet Union and Russia in the world and the forces that affected it. Lebedeva begins with the founding of the Soviet Union, which established an ideologically constrained environment for discussing international relations. Prior to World War II, there were few writers who ventured into international relations topics, and the few who did stayed close to Marxist-Leninist interpretations of class conflict and the eventual victory of Communism over capitalism.² The lack of production was partially a result of the Soviet Union being an outside player in the international sphere between the world wars, and also because all international contacts were centrally controlled by a few leaders in Moscow and any contact outside official channels led to allegations of treason (31).

The Soviet Union’s place in the world changed dramatically after World War II, accompanied by the emergence of new institutions to study regions of the world, including North America, Asia, Latin America, and later, Europe. While Marxism-Leninism was still the orthodox analytic paradigm, these institutions began to produce analysis founded on what Lebedeva calls intuitive realism. Marxism-Leninism is internationalist by nature, viewing the status of class structures as being more influential than states. Intuitive realism, on the other hand, views states as the sole actors in international relations, although still dividing the world into socialist and bourgeois camps (39). The focus on states was directed toward strengthening socialist states to protect themselves against supposedly belligerent bourgeois states.

Lebedeva describes two additional categories into which Russian thinkers on international relations topics divide: the global integrators or Westernizers and the isolationists (56). Those two groups appear to be the


modern representations of the historical Westernizers and Slavophiles, with isolationists taking a line similar to that of Slavophiles that Russian society is better off without the influences of the West.

The evolution of Russian international thought and the analysis of international forces took a sharp turn when the Soviet Union dissolved. That event released the ideological restraints that determined all formal Russian international relations thinking during the Soviet era. The Westernizer-integrator trend was freed to discuss economic and political forces in the world that during the Soviet era were either taboo topics or were limited by strict dogmatism. Moscow’s central hold on international relations also faded, with analytic and educational institutions popping up across Russia.

The book was published in 2019, so while it does account for a deterioration in Russia’s relations with the United States and European Union following Russia’s annexation of Crimea, it precedes Russia’s full-scale military invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Thus, it does not cover the extreme isolationist turn in Russian thinking since the invasion or the tight controls placed on speech, including academic discourse, since then. Consequently, the book is not as helpful in interpreting the current environment, although it does provide the historical antecedents to Russian international relations thinking today.

The second section of the book offers a review of literature produced by Russian scholars on international topics, including theory, security, economic relations, and the human dimension. Lebedeva provides an objective description of the literature without judging its validity, covering the full spectrum from isolationists to global integrators.

One area Lebedeva does not cover in is the role of intelligence and state security services in Russia’s interpretation of the world. Intelligence and state security leaders, such as Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Director Sergey Naryshkin and Director of the Federal Security Service (FSB) Alexander Bortnikov, are frequent commentators on international topics, invariably taking the isolationist line. Although these are government statements and thus do not come from academic institutions, they do establish government orthodoxy that can drive scholarly discourse, especially during a time of heightened patriotic fervor that characterizes Russia today.

Russian intelligence and state security services also sponsor international affairs analytic organizations, including the Russian Institute of Strategic Studies (RISI), which Lebedeva notes (61). RISI is the heir to the KGB’s Scientific Institute of Intelligence Problems and is staffed with retired SVR officers. Also influential in the Russian government’s thinking about international security is the Information-Analysis Directorate (IAU) in the FSB’s Fifth Service. IAU’s analytic output is seldom published openly, but its proximity to the Russian Security Council gives it more influence on Russian international security decisionmaking than academic institutions have. The omission of the intelligence and state security connection in the book reflects the fact that such topics are off-limits for Russian scholars. The role of intelligence services in laying the

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foundation of Russian international thought cannot be ignored and there may be context to some of the literature that Lebedeva reviews that she is not at liberty to discuss.5

Nevertheless, the book is particularly valuable for readers who do not routinely read Russian academic literature. It traces the thinking, the institutions where that thinking was done, and the educational institutions where international relations was taught. It contains an extensive bibliography of Russian publications on international topics, covering the spectrum from global integrators and isolationists. The bibliography alone is a valuable resource for studying Russian experts’ views of the world and Russia’s place in it. Lebedeva’s analysis of that literature places it in an understandable context.

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