

# Review of Samuel Charap and Timothy J. Colton. *Everyone Loses: The Ukraine Crisis and the Ruinous Contest for Post-Soviet Eurasia*

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**Samuel Charap and Timothy J. Colton.** *Everyone Loses: The Ukraine Crisis and the Ruinous Contest for Post-Soviet Eurasia*. The International Institute for Strategic Studies / Routledge, 2017. Adelphi 56, no. 460. 212 pp. Maps. Notes. Index. \$23.95, paper.

**T**he Russia-Ukraine crisis is a highly polarizing topic. The reasons for this conflict, which has lasted seven years now, claimed over thirteen thousand lives, and produced two million refugees, are still debated. In the book *Everyone Loses: The Ukraine Crisis and the Ruinous Contest for Post-Soviet Eurasia*, authors Samuel Charap and Timothy J. Colton argue that the war is “a product of zero-sum policies pursued by Russia, the US and the EU” and that “no party . . . has clean hands” (23). Both claims are quite simplistic, as there is significant variance between the policies of the actors in question and in the amount of “dirt” on their hands. But the authors vow to put aside the issue of guilt and to focus on how to resolve the conflict.

The book is based on political statements and secondary sources. Like many “realist” accounts of the topic, the narrative starts not with 2013 or with Ukrainian independence but with the post-Cold War settlement—a “settlement-that-wasn’t,” according to the authors (30). They repeat accusations (that can be found both in the Russian public discourse and in some Western accounts) that the West ignored Russian interests and violated alleged promises not to expand the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO; a point that was mentioned in early 1990 but was not and could never, owing to the principle of sovereignty, have been turned into a binding agreement). In doing so, the authors play down the fact that quite a comprehensive settlement was achieved, as is shown in chapter 1 (“Cold Peace” [29-72]): the Charter of Paris for a New Europe; the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE); the Partnership for Peace (PfP); the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE); the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation (NATO-Russia Founding Act); and the acceptance of Russia into the Group of Eight (G8) and the Council of Europe. The disadvantages for Russia are exaggerated here. The acceptance of the three Baltic states into NATO certainly did not extend the Western umbrella “deep into the former . . . Soviet Union”; it was only some four hundred kilometres—that is, four percent of the ten-thousand-kilometre east-west axis of the USSR (73).

Chapter 2 (“Contestation Entrenched” [73-112]) describes the competition between post-Soviet Russia and the West in Russia’s neighbouring countries—the “In-Betweens” (40), as they are consistently called in the book. The authors’ interpretation of the international context is built on a great-power theorem, and it leads to the conclusion that Ukraine and most other post-Soviet states other than Russia are apparently not fully

sovereign. They allegedly have “no historical memory of being part of Europe” (65) and create a “problem” for the rest of the world. As a consequence, they have to conform to the “security interests” of their neighbouring great power(s). While the book claims somewhat misleadingly that “Russian forces had left Georgia by November 2007” (85), the alert reader will discover in the endnotes that this does not apply to Abkhazia or South Ossetia.

Chapter 3 (“Breaking Point” [113-50]) looks at the Ukrainian revolution of 2014. In describing the events as a “violent overthrow” (18), the authors pay tribute to the official Russian reading. In fact, the course of events as it is presented in the book does not support such a characterization: mostly peaceful demonstrations against the Yanukovych regime; violence used mostly against the demonstrators; an internationally mediated agreement to organize early elections; the failure of this agreement and the flight of Viktor Yanukovych; the Russian annexation of the Crimea; and fighting in eastern Ukraine. Whether Russia “seized on a wave of anti-Maidan . . . protests” (131) or played a more proactive role will continue to be investigated.

The book ends by decrying the negative consequences of the conflict, including the “rupturing of commercial ties with . . . Russia” (154). All of the parties in question have certainly been worse off economically after 2014. The Russian president is one of the few people whose approval ratings soared in the course of the conflict. So, what solutions do the authors of the book offer? Multilateral talks among Eastern European states, the West, and Russia should lead to the following arrangement: all signatories should be allowed to pursue ties with the EU and the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) simultaneously; commit themselves to seek mutual acceptable solutions; respect each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty; and rule out unilateral changes and the use of force. In addition, Russia should withdraw from Transnistria and the Donbas (182).

While most of this (except, perhaps, the last point) seems to be acceptable to all parties, the benefit for the Eastern European states (and the West) is less concrete. The principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act, and several agreements and treaties have not prevented Russian action against Ukraine. Therefore, it seems questionable whether the security of the smaller states in the region could be safeguarded by a treaty such as the one proposed by the authors. Thus, alliance membership remains an unresolved point. This book, however, can be looked at positively for attempting to bring forward a solution to some of the political issues in the European-Russian neighbourhood.

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