2008

h-diplo

H-Diplo Roundtable Reviews
www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables
Volume IX, No. 5 (2008)
21 March 2008

David S. Foglesong. *The American Mission and the "Evil Empire": The Crusade for a "Free Russia" since 1881*. New York: Cambridge University Press, October 2007. ISBN-13: 978-0521855907 (hardback); 978-0521671835 (paperback).

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Stable URL: http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/AmericanMission-roundtable.pdf

Review by Walter L. Hixson, University of Akron

This excellent book analyzes the modern history of U.S.-Russian relations in the context of a continuous American drive to transform first Russia and then the Soviet Union. Foglesong, who teaches at Rutgers, has previously published several important works on the U.S.-Russian relationship and thus is well suited for this project. I believe *The American Mission and the "Evil Empire"* now stands as the best available work covering the entire history of modern U.S.-Russian relations.

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What distinguishes this study is Foglesong's willingness to look beyond the standard —and all too rarely interrogated —"realist" frame. Instead of responding primarily to geopolitics and national interests, the American-Russian relationship reflected the "protean American drives to transform Russia" (ix). Moreover, "When those hopes for a free Russia were obstructed, Americans often characterized opposing forces in Russia as not merely despotic but diabolical."(6)

Terms such as "diabolical," "mission," and "crusade" underscore another major contribution of Foglesong's study, the willingness to examine the considerable role that religious motivations played in shaping American attitudes and policies toward Russia. This study thus complements a rapidly growing body of important work addressing the impact of religion and culture on all facets of U.S. foreign policy.

The analysis of modern U.S.-Russian relations begins appropriately with the American response to the assassination of Alexander II, with the autocrat widely perceived in the United States as a Christian martyr. Politicians, clergymen, and journalists such as George Kennan sought to bring salvation to Russia, just as others had advocated for China, the Philippines, and other nations and areas of the globe.

Disillusioned by Russian "nihilism" and the failure of the 1905 upheaval, Americans "rapturously welcomed" the liberal revolution of 1917, which they believed would "invigorate Russia's fighting spirit and throw open doors to American political, economic, and religious influence." (50) History of course transformed those dreams into nightmares later that same year, with the ultimate outcome being the "demonization of Bolshevik Russia" that would prevail for the next seven-plus decades. (56) In American cultural perceptions, Russia had been transformed from the anarchists and nihilists of the tsarist era into an even more sinister amalgam of communists, German agents, and, even worse to some, "Hebrews."

Foglesong's narrative turns next to the interwar period in which American Protestants and reformers continued to mount an extraordinary effort to save Russia until Joseph Stalin slammed the door on the foreign crusaders. As one Pentecostal leader observed, Russia "still remains open and millions of white people are waiting for the message of life." (60) Excellent in his analysis of U.S. religious motivations, Foglesong might have done more, as the above comment suggests, to play out the profound impact of American racial formations on foreign policy.

The Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 led to the emergence of the Grand Alliance and a corresponding "rebirth of hopes for a free Russia." (106) The onset of the Cold War — or, better yet, the *revival* of the Cold War that had prevailed since 1917 — underscored that the American cause was one of good versus evil. Following in the path of several studies over the past decade, Foglesong grasps that despite the misleading trope of "containment" the United States sought to destroy Soviet communism in a "crusade for freedom" that unfolded primarily through propaganda and cultural infiltration of the Soviet empire.

Not surprisingly, given the focus of Foglesong's previous scholarship on the earlier period of U.S.-Russian relations, his chapters on the more recent history are less rich than the earlier ones. The study would have benefited from more cultural analysis of familiar events such as the Cuban Missile Crisis as well as the détente era. However, Foglesong takes up the slack in his analysis of Jimmy Carter's highly visible human rights campaign, which heightened expectations for a "free Russia," and of the Reagan era, which brought a "revitalization of orthodox faith" in transforming Russia. (173)

Foglesong thankfully dispenses with one of the most popularly held canards of cold war mythology — that Reagan successfully implemented a "plan" to undermine the Soviet evil empire. "Contrary to the claims of partisan Republicans and neo-conservative ideologues, Reagan did not have a coherent, consistent strategy to cause the collapse of Soviet communism." (175) On the other hand, while Reagan at least "welcomed Mikhail Gorbachev's dramatic changes, the incoming Bush administration appeared oblivious to them." (199)

The American Mission and the "Evil Empire" closes with fresh analysis of the post-Soviet era in which huge numbers of missionaries and reformers once again flocked overseas to assure the salvation of the now-liberated Russia. Alas, by the end of the 1990s a blundering American diplomacy, combined with the corruption, crony capitalism, and reversion to authoritarianism inside Russia, delivered a "backlash against Western cultural penetration of the former Soviet Union." (213)

The foolhardy U.S. decision (my term, not Foglesong's) to expand NATO by admitting as many former Warsaw Pact nations and former Soviet republics as possible could only create renewed enmity between Russia and the United States, but such "realities" were apparently too profound for the Clinton administration or the State Department to grasp. As Foglesong puts it, more moderately, "Together with disappointment at the limited financial assistance from the West, disillusionment with capitalism, and bitterness about declining standards of living, indignation at NATO expansion spurred a major shift in the Russian political environment." (214)

Thus by the turn of twenty first century the dream of transforming Russia into a liberal democracy had failed, prompting Foglesong to entitle his last chapter "Mission Unaccomplished." Ironically, and perhaps somewhat in contradiction with the evidence he has presented, Foglesong hints that the United States might have transformed Russia or made progress toward that aim through wiser policies. I suspect, however, that the problem all along was in not allowing Russia to be Russia, which is of course a deep seated and culturally grounded problem that runs (as the second George Kennan might have put it) like a "red skein" across the entire history of American diplomacy.

By the end of this study, critics will be challenged to dispute Foglesong's argument for continuity rather than discontinuity over the sweep of U.S.-Russian relations. What emerges is a continuous foreign policy grounded in the protean American drive to "free Russia." In addition to the strong analysis throughout, this book is brilliantly illustrated and handsomely packaged by Cambridge University Press. The seventeen illustrations of editorial cartoons, magazine covers, and propaganda posters complement Foglesong's argument and some are quite striking in the power of their religious imagery.

Finally, *The American Mission and the "Evil Empire"* draws on exhaustive research. The notes and bibliography – more than 100 pages of primary and secondary citations— constitute a valuable resource in their own right. This is first-rate history, well researched,

persuasively argued, and original, and should serve for some time as the standard single-volume work on the full sweep of modern U.S.-Russian relations.