Keir Giles, **Moscow Rules: What Drives Russia to Confront the West**. Washington, DC and London: Brookings Institution Press and Chatham House, 2019. 234 pages. ISBN 978-0-8157-3574-8.

Even after eight years of military aggression by Russia against Ukraine, it was only in 2022 that the relationship between Russia and the West took a decisive turn for the worse. That shift did not result from a new, groundbreaking evaluation of Russia's behavior by the West, however. Instead, it was forced upon the West by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Now, many EU and NATO countries are beginning to realize that a reassessment of their existing approach to Russia is more urgent than ever. The change in the overall perception of Russia, the former superpower, was inevitable.

What made this recalibration of the West's perception of Russia necessary is the central theme of the 2019 book *Moscow Rules: What Drives Russia to Confront the West*, written by Keir Giles. Giles is a senior consulting fellow at the Russia and Eurasia Programme of Chatham House and the director of the UK Conflict Studies Research Centre. He has profound expertise on issues related to Russia and its military. The main objective of his book is to explain the many ways in which Russia is different from the Western world. In so doing, he avoids complex theoretical concepts, preferring to describe the reality on the ground, based mainly on accounts by people who have had the chance to experience Russia directly.

Giles's book consists of four main parts, encompassing ten chapters in total, as well as a conclusion. Each part sheds light on a set of the realities of today's Russia. Specific aspects of each set are elaborated in detail in the individual chapters.

Entitled "Russia's Place in the World," the first part of the book describes where Russia stands in the post-Cold War international system, both in reality and in Russia's own, somewhat different perception. The opening chapter is an introduction to a topic that frequently recurs in the rest of the book: the assumption that Russia simply cannot be considered a European or Western-style country and must be viewed through a different lens than is commonly used by Western policymakers. Citing historical accounts and contemporary sources, Giles shows how the understanding of politics, the world in general, and basic terminology such as "democracy" or "respect" diverges between Russia and the West. In part, Giles blames the West's misperceptions of Russia on the fact that most of Russia's communication with the West is mediated by Russia's "liberal intelligentsia," an insignificant and unrepresentative group within Russian society (p. 4).

In the second chapter, Giles elaborates upon Russia's obsession with its status as a superpower. This, he maintains, manifests itself in several ways. Firstly, unlike the Western powers in the twentieth century, Russia never detached itself from the concept that, as a state, it has greater rights than other states (p. 14). Thus, the understanding of sovereignty is significantly different in Russia than it is in the West, as evidenced by the Kremlin's actions abroad (p. 27). Also, Russia seeks to have its say in a number of international matters despite not having any real relation to them (p. 17). Based on Russia's patterns of international behavior, Giles argues that the West finds itself in a repeating cycle of failed

attempts to engage Russia positively as a partner. He cites U.S. President Barack Obama's fruitless attempt to reset relations in 2009 as an example (p. 25). Giles contends that Russia will only start coming to terms with the reality that it is past its former greatness after it experiences its first military defeat (p. 29).

The third chapter analyzes Russia's persistent belief that the West poses an eternal threat to its existence. According to Giles, every move by the West is viewed in Russia as a part of a great conspiracy seeking regime change in Moscow. This includes the "color revolutions" in the post-Soviet space and even events as remote as the Arab Spring. Importantly, Giles addresses the commonly posed question of whether Kremlin actually believes in this narrative or only exploits it to support its domestic interests. He points out how prevalent this narrative is in the Russian information space, and argues this prevalence actually prevents Moscow from restraining it, should it ever want to (p. 38). Giles warns that with Putin's achievement of a third term as President in 2012 and its increasing energy revenues, Russia finds itself in a position where it can take action to address its security concerns, real or feigned, through military means, as it has done in Syria and Ukraine (p. 53).

In the final chapter of the first part of his book, Giles demonstrates how differently Russia and the West experienced the end of the Cold War. As he suggests, Russia perceives the dissolution of the Soviet Union as its own choice and a concession that the West has exploited to Russia's detriment (p. 60). According to Giles, Russia adamantly refused to be "absorbed" by the West in the 1990s and continued building up a distrustful attitude towards NATO and the EU. When he took over from Boris Yeltsin, Putin encouraged this trend and sought to renegotiate the post-Cold War order on the basis of that distrust (p. 68).

Part II of the book provides insight into Russia's unique system of governance and the interaction between the state and its citizens. In the first two chapters of Part II, Giles explains why Putin is not exceptional in Russian history. He describes Putin's rule as following in Russia's traditional line of autocratic governance, which the Soviet era also represented (p. 75). Giles describes how the historical rulers of Russia have been perceived by its citizens, contending that Russian leaders are considered the embodiment of the state itself, and its owners as well, who enjoy the right to profit from ruling the country (p. 78). Giles also argues that the success of Putin's regime and its increasing assertiveness abroad is directly related to limits on the flow of information from the West to Russia. He expects Russia's hostility to the West to increase, no matter how the West responds to its actions (p. 80). One of the strongest points Giles makes here is his claim that any sort of debate about the legitimacy of Putin's power is irrelevant because given present realities, his legitimacy is beyond question (p. 81).

In the second chapter of Part II, Giles develops his claim that the Russians are subjects rather than citizens of Russia. He says that they are being used en masse to achieve the ambitions of the state. As evidence, he cites the Kremlin's indifference to losses among its soldiers and to civilian casualties in conflicts (p. 91), as well as the state's cavalier attitude to property rights. Giles regards the Kremlin's lack of accountability to the Russian

public as one of the most important misunderstandings under which the EU operates when it considers imposing sanctions on Russia (p. 93).

The author also explains the history of the rule of law in Russia. He elaborates on "suspended punishment," the ad hoc, selective enforcement of laws, which means that Russian "subjects" can find themselves on the wrong side of the law at any moment (p. 96). Giles emphasizes that this system has existed since the Russian empire. He points out that the consequence is the role of informal structures and practices in the country, which make Russia's system incompatible with the West and most of the international community as a whole (p. 99).

The third part of Giles's book discusses the heritage that has formed contemporary Russian society and its system of values. In chapter 7, Giles observes several situations that prevail in Russia, yet are marginal if they exist at all in the West. Among these are the Orthodox church, an important proponent of state power. Another, he asserts, is the tendency of Russians to avoid taking personal responsibility for their actions (p. 104). Giles, however, especially stresses the ubiquitousness of lies in Russian politics and among the public, as opposed to rational thought and respect for objective facts embraced in the West (p. 115). The author also emphasizes the crucial role of the myth-ridden "Great Patriotic War" (1941–45) in the creation of a guiding philosophy for Russian society after 1991 (p. 105). Giles believes that Russians' overall resistance to liberal values is a means of protecting a treasured Russian worldview. He further develops his thesis in chapter 8, where he focuses on Russia's history. He says that Russia's future can be predicted to a certain degree, because the arc of the country's history follows a cycle of "revolution-breakdown-consolidation-stagnation" (p. 118). The author stresses the importance of officially approved historical narratives as a unifying factor for Russia's society under Putin. These narratives provide Putin with justification for his foreign policy actions. For that reason, the Russian leadership seeks to ensure that its favored narratives go unchallenged, even though they are based on obvious fabrications, most clearly in regard to the origins of Russia and the role of Ukraine in its history (pp. 121–122). Giles believes Russia and the West approach their histories entirely differently, in that other countries tend to face up to their history and learn from it, while Russians refuse to do so (p. 123).

Part IV provides a historical account of attempts to change the status quo in Russia and current trends that, according to the author, might foretell changes for the Russian state. In chapter 9, Giles argues that Westerners tend to overrate the potential of liberal movements in Russia, in spite of their obvious suppression by the state and the general political disengagement of the Russian population. He develops the idea of Russia as a "decorative democracy," i.e., a state where western-style institutions exist but really serve only the interests of the leadership (p. 129). He recognizes, however, that the mass murders of citizens of the Soviet era do not take place any more. Repression now only targets the most prominent figures that pose a threat to the regime (p. 133). Despite all this, Giles sees a glimmer of potential in Russia's youth. He thinks that improving their

access to online communication is a possible road to increasing their political engagement and putting pressure on the regime (p. 137).

The last chapter of the book warns against "groundless optimism" in the West regarding future developments in Russia, especially since many predictions of Putin's downfall have come to naught. Giles attributes the West's optimism to a lack of institutional memory and its failure to understand the fundamental incompatibilities between itself and Russia. He cites the events of 2014 as only a partial wake-up call (p. 141). For Western hopes to be realized, Giles emphasizes that society must change in Russia. In that context, he again stresses the potential of the post-2000 generation in Russia. He portrays it as completely different from its predecessors. Whilst knowing nothing but Putinism so far and therefore prone to seek change, it is also gradually being exposed to more open sources of information via the internet and generally is less fearful than previous generations (p. 150). Unfortunately, Giles doubts that Russia's economic suffering is sufficient to bring another revolution to Russia. In the end, however, he hedges his bets by saying that such events can be rather unpredictable (p. 156).

In his conclusion, the author insists that if one is aware of the patterns of Russian history, Moscow's behavior can be predicted. Putin, he says, is following in his predecessors' footsteps rather than blazing a new path (p. 160). Giles proposes a long-term strategy for the West in managing its relationship with Russia, one which requires comprehension, confrontation, and containment. In order to maintain peace, Giles states, the West must recognize how Russia is different and take those differences into account as it tries to cooperate with Russia on the interests that both sides share. He counsels strategic patience (p. 174).

Giles does not seem to want to enrich the topic of the West's relationship with Russia with new, never-before-seen discoveries. Instead, the main value of the author's work lies in his ability to arrange existing knowledge into a logical mosaic that puts Russia's often very contradictory behavior into perspective.

Giles's book has the potential to radically change a Westerner's perception of Russia in less than 200 pages. Making full use historical sources, he explains why the areas of incompatibility between the West and Russia are inevitable. He provides an exhaustive account of Russian leadership and, perhaps more importantly, Russian society. Ultimately, he compiles a tremendous amount of evidence to support his point that Russia simply cannot be viewed as any other European country.

Furthermore, Giles rather impressively maintains the clarity of his text despite the extensive and diverse nature of its topic. He creates an easily understood glossary of the repeating patterns that can be observed in Russia's political and societal behavior. Accordingly, his work resembles in many aspects that of George Kennan, whom he often references in his text.

The author does, though, present some of his arguments with a certainty that at times seems unfounded. This especially applies to some social phenomena which he tries to portray as unique to Russia and absent in Europe, such as the tendency of Russians to avoid personal responsibility. While he does explain the reasons for their presence in

Russian society, their implied exclusive Russian-ness appears inconclusive as no elaborate probe to the Western society is provided by the author, leaving such claims open to question. That failure is, however, excusable, given that his book focuses on Russia, and does not have much room for the specifics of Western society.

Overall, Giles has produced a work of major importance both to his academic peers and to Western policymakers who deal with matters regarding Russia. Giles's decision to focus mainly on the reality on the ground rather than to construct a grand theoretical framework gives weight to his explanations of Russian behavior, and also to his tailored design for an approach to counter it. Moreover, despite the fact that the text was published in 2019, the amazing accuracy of Giles's descriptions of the inner drivers of Moscow's actions and the foreseeable threats they pose to the West have been proven by Russia's brutal full-scale invasion of Ukraine three years later. With the Russian army now poised on the doorstep of the West, a straightforward analysis of contemporary Russia such as this one is needed more than ever.

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