

M. E. Sarotte, **Not One Inch: America, Russia, and the Making of Post-Cold War Stalemate**. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021. 568 pages. ISBN 978-0-300-25993-3.

*Not One Inch: America, Russia, and the Making of Post-Cold War Stalemate*, written by M.E. Sarotte, centers around US-Russian relations and the impact on NATO expansion. The book was published in 2021, less than a year before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia, and continues to feel extremely relevant. The author is currently a professor at Johns Hopkins University; her work has primarily been about the fall of the Berlin wall and transatlantic relations following the end of the Cold War. *Not One Inch* is her newest book, and it analyzes the development of NATO in the post-Cold War space. The title comes from a quote by former Secretary of State, James Baker, who allegedly promised Gorbachev that if Moscow released East Germany, NATO would “not shift one inch eastward from its present position” (p. 1). Obviously, this promise did not last. The book confronts the issues that transpired from this comment and the events that took place after. Sarotte’s argument is that NATO expansion was not necessarily the problem, but the strategies used from both the American and Russian sides created some of those issues that led to no improvements for the situation between the US and Russia. The book covers important themes such as diplomacy between leaders, NATO expansion in Central and Eastern Europe, and the question of Ukraine and Russia.

Sarotte sets out to discuss how NATO expanded after 1990 and who benefited from it. The thesis of this book is that the challenges caused by the entreaties of developing democracies in Central and Eastern Europe during the 1990s justified Western leaders expanding NATO, although the way NATO expanded into Central and Eastern Europe was problematic. While Sarotte does not think that expanding NATO was a bad idea, the way that NATO was expanded did not improve the status of the US and Russia or set the countries on a positive trajectory together. The argument is split into three parts; it is divided into 1989–1992, 1993–1994, and then 1995–1999. It begins with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of East and West Germany, then progresses to Bill Clinton’s inauguration and transition to US president, and lastly concludes with the downfall of both Russian and American leaders, and the further transition to the twenty-first century. This works well because Sarotte sets a lot of the responsibility of NATO on the rulers of these countries, and begins with Gorbachev and Bush, to move onto Clinton and Yeltsin, and then conclude with Putin.

There are three questions that Sarotte sets at the beginning and then answers at the end. She confronts issues such as the intentions of the US to expand NATO after the Cold War, how American decisions coincided with post-Soviet Russia, and interactions between the two countries that ultimately led to a decline in relationships (p. 338). These questions demonstrate that Sarotte views the US as a leading decision maker on NATO expansion. The answer to the first question is that the Americans wanted to cement their cooperation with European countries, especially those with nuclear arsenals. They wanted to avoid replication of the Cold War and creating a new division over Europe, but sadly this is exactly what happened (p. 341). Secondly, Sarotte believes that it should have been

assumed that Russia would remain a major international player especially because of the nuclear arsenal (p. 344). As Russia would be in possession of such a powerful tool, that meant that the US should have given Moscow more autonomy and say over the decisions that directly and indirectly affected them. Finally, the last question is that there is a “need to make a virtue of necessity” (p. 350). NATO is the answer to the US’s involvement with Europe. Russia is impossible to ignore when dealing with Europe; the best decision would have been to foster that relationship, but this is where both the US and Russia failed. Sarotte finishes her book on a rather pessimistic note. Despite any hope for a better US-Russia relationship in the twenty-first century, the relation between the two powers remained the same as the US-Soviet relationship regardless of efforts made by the political leaders of the 1990s. Overall, Sarotte does a great job of showing the evolution of US-Russian relations. She does not blame NATO enlargement for the weakened relationship, but blames it on communication, domestic policy, and assumptions made by both sides (p. 7). Unfortunately, the book does not offer an optimistic outlook on the future, because she was unclear if Russia and the US could return to a potentially positive future. Since the publication of the book, this is not an option.

One of the primary themes throughout the book is the relationship between Boris Yeltsin, Bill Clinton, as well as Helmut Kohl. To an extent, Sarotte implies that the future of NATO expansion and US-Russian relations depended entirely on the personal connection Yeltsin and Clinton had together. One of the biggest elements within the relationship between Yeltsin and the various political leaders were the attempts of flattery by Clinton. Unfortunately, this relationship had to deal with the individual problems of both Clinton and Yeltsin. Yeltsin was a severe alcoholic and that began to alter his health and his ability to lead during the second half of his presidency. This had been a problem from the very beginning, but at the start this was tolerated by other leaders, especially Clinton. He thought that “Yeltsin drunk was better for the United States than most other Russian leaders sober” (p. 157). Yeltsin was seen as a collaborator with the United States. Unfortunately, when he was no longer to carry out his presidential duties, he could no longer be useful. Clinton also faced his own problems at the end of his presidency which negatively altered his career. Towards the end of Clinton’s presidency, his reputation was severely affected by the cheating scandal with Monica Lewinsky. The impeachment trials ruined public opinion of him worldwide. While the intentions at the beginning of the 1990s were to transform the US-Russian relationship into a positive one, these vanished when the leaders were no longer capable of such change. The lack of change they were able to enact led to Putin’s rule, which caused Russia to revert to their past and attempt reclamation of their former territory.

Another major theme is the expansion of NATO into Central and Eastern Europe. It was a sensitive subject for Moscow to have its former satellites now move further towards the West. At the beginning, Kohl recommended that Russia be treated the same as Germany in 1945, “a defeated adversary in need of essential help.” But priorities changed, and the Americans knew that they could not continue to protect Russia’s future without also listening to the wishes of Central Europe to join NATO (p. 155). Polish president Lech

Wałęsa continuously expressed his desire to join to Bush and Clinton. He said that “we resolutely desire to join Western Europe and the United States in political, economic, and military terms” (p. 109). One of the biggest challenges faced in allowing them to enter NATO, according to American leadership, was the unwillingness of Russia. As an attempt at a compromise, other organizations and alliances were offered as alternatives or promised as “steppingstones” for acceptance into NATO. Eventually, Poland, Hungary, and Czech Republic were invited to and joined NATO in 1999 as full members, but it meant having to go against what Yeltsin wished for. Instead, Russians were provided with a NATO-Russia Council that merely provided Russia a space for communication with NATO without providing any other involvement (p. 317). Although Russia would never join NATO, the inclusion of Central Europe with benefits such as Article 5 did not improve the political standing of Russia at all. This looks especially worse for Russia when compared with former Soviet satellites in Central Europe.

While Ukraine was not a primary topic, it was an underlying issue consistently mentioned throughout the chapters. When Ukraine is mentioned, it is regarding Russia’s continued hold over Ukraine. Issues on how to deal with Ukraine happened even before the Soviet collapse; US Secretary of Defense at the time, Dick Cheney, hoped to bolster any partnership or communication with Ukraine due to their nuclear arsenal (p. 121). Yeltsin was unready to let Ukraine go. The history of Ukraine as a part of Russia was strongly established in his mind. A contention point developed early on is the matter of the Black Sea Fleet. Ukraine’s Leonid Kuchma and Yeltsin argued over the continued military presence of Russia in Sevastopol, with Yeltsin insisting on a document limiting NATO’s influence over Ukraine (p. 313). Even though a conclusion was reached eventually, the Black Sea Fleet matter has not been truly resolved. It has been clear for a long time that Russia’s need to control Ukraine will continue, and Sarotte suggested that “Western efforts should focus on creating political rather than violent means of addressing the discord” (p. 331). Unfortunately, Russia’s war on Ukraine has taken away any chance of the two countries coexisting without conflict. Despite attempts at sanctions after annexation of Crimea and the 2022 full-scale invasion, Russia is not going to give up Ukraine and the role of the West has been to provide aid in the forms of military equipment and resources beyond the scope that Sarotte may have intended.

Following the timeline after the book, the question of NATO, Russia, and the United States rested on the hands of Vladimir Putin. The book establishes the framework for many issues that have heavily influenced Russian aggression against Ukraine in the twenty-first century. Concerns set after Soviet collapse have continued to remain concerns for over 30 years. Reflecting on Sarotte, one of the most relevant questions is that of Ukraine’s wish to join NATO. The line on what is comfortable for Russia has inched further and further east. If Ukraine had been admitted into NATO, this would have drastically reduced Russia’s sphere of influence, and they would have had to share a significant border with a new NATO country; this is an idea that was sure to be seen as unacceptable by any Russian leadership. Additionally, comparing the themes studied within the book, it is clear how some of the matters discussed have impacted Putin. Throughout

Putin's speeches, he has actively dismissed many former Soviet and Russian leaders, particularly Yeltsin and Gorbachev. In contrast with Yeltsin, Putin did not build close connections or trust with Western leaders. The treatment of Ukraine is a stark contrast with Yeltsin; although begrudgingly, Yeltsin promised Bush that if Ukraine wanted independence by more than 70%, Ukraine would be recognized as independent from Russia (p. 129). Yeltsin might not have truly believed in these actions, but this is an area where Putin feels that Yeltsin made fools out of the Russian people. This is one reason that he argued for the invasion; Ukrainians and Russians are "brothers" and they should not be separated. Putin no longer sees two independent countries as a possibility; instead, it has become his mission to take over Ukrainian territory and gain back what Yeltsin had lost.

In conclusion, *Not One Inch* provides a good background of the politics and interpersonal relations of world leaders in the post-Cold War era, and it should be recommended. Sarotte's argumentation is strong overall and the book provides useful background information; however, it feels like she may oversimplify her argument by suggesting that so much of NATO expansion rested on the hands of the US and Russian leaders. It does not consider much autonomy other countries had over NATO admittance or their opinions. She sporadically mentions UK, France or Spain throughout the book, but when she does it feels like an afterthought rather than relevant information to her main argument. Despite this weakness, the research throughout the book uses a wide variety of sources that provide a unique and in-depth analysis. She makes wonderful use of speeches, interviews and previously unpublished documents including from NATO headquarters, and using materials from both the East and the West helps cement her argument. This book was published at a rather coincidental timing; original publication of the book was in September of 2021, and while Sarotte could not have predicted it, Ukraine was brutally invaded only a few months later in late February of 2022. Because Putin and other leaders have all referred to various historical events and leaders as their reasonings behind their actions, this provides a strong context into the history that they are referring to and often reinterpreting. She does not directly state ideas such as NATO expansion being one of the justifications of Russia has continuously decided to attack Ukraine, but she does demonstrate that Russia felt misrepresented or undervalued during NATO expansion. This has prevented Russia's relationship with the West from improving since the Soviet Union, and Sarotte would place the blame on the US for this. It remains open for debate if the decision making from Western leaders after the Soviet collapse could have set Russia on a better trajectory for the future.

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