Gordon M. Hahn, *Ukraine Over the Edge. Russia, the West and the New* ‘*Cold War*’. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2018, viii + 359pp., $38.50 p/b.

Kees Van der Pijl, *Flight MH17, Ukraine and the New Cold War. Prism of Disaster*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018, ix + 198pp., £18.99 p/b.

THESE TWO BOOKS ADOPT A FIVE-POINT TEMPLATE ON THE UKRAINE–RUSSIA crisis deferential to

Russia and ﬁrst developed by Richard Sakwa and Nicolai Pedro who, Van der Pijl admits, ‘encouraged me to write’ this book (p. 31). The template includes blaming the West and the Ukrainian authorities for the crisis; describing Crimea as always ‘Russian’; depicting Ukraine as an artiﬁcial, regionally divided and failed state; downplaying Russian military intervention and describing the conﬂict as a ‘civil war’; and exaggerating Ukrainian nationalism while downplaying Russian nationalism.

Hahn blames the Ukrainian authorities for launching an ‘unnecessary war’ (p. 253) and ‘civil war’ (p. 264) accompanied by war crimes, human rights abuses and a ‘dehumanising’ discourse. Van der Pijl compares Ukraine’s military actions against pro-Russian proxies from April 2014 as similar to those of Georgia, which launched an ‘invasion’ (p. 8) of South Ossetia in 2008; countries cannot ‘invade’ their own territories.

Both authors ignore Russia’s massive information warfare. As the *Disinformation Review* published by the European Union points out, Ukraine is the number-one target. An April 2018 Levada Center poll found Ukraine to be second only to the US in being perceived by Russians as a threat to Russia. Blaming the West for pressuring Ukraine to make a ‘civilisation choice’, Hahn (pp. 175–76) ignores Russia’s longer pressure on Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych to take Ukraine into the CIS Customs Union. A major focus of Van der Pijl’s book is deﬂecting blame for the shooting down of MH17 in July 2014 away from Russia and towards Ukraine and the West. He discusses MH17 as part of a Western conspiracy of the EU Eastern Partnership (described as the ‘Atlantic project’, p. 29) with Ukraine to be transformed into an ‘advance post for NATO’ (Van der Pijl, p. 147) and used ‘to destabilise the Putin presidency’ (Van der Pijl, p. 76). This was coupled with US ‘directed regime change’ in Kyiv (Van der Pijl, pp. 30, 69, 105) by ‘neo-conservatives in the US government and NATO’ working through ‘fascists’ and ‘nationalists’ with ‘Blackwater’ mercenaries (a company that has not undertaken ‘security contracting’ since 2009), with the CIA and the FBI operating in the background. During the Euromaidan Revolution the US was led not by a Republican neo-Conservative but by

Democratic Party President Barack Obama.

Van der Pijl (p. 115) blames the downing of MH17 on the ‘war party’ in Kyiv (a term he uses throughout his book), which ‘had the means and the motive, as well as a track record of proven brutality’ and the downing of MH17 ‘tends to cast the greatest suspicion on Kiev’. Van der Pijl belittles his own, Dutch, government’s methodical investigation and the work of think-tanks such as Bellingcat, which he describes as a ‘peddler of false claims’ (p. 139). In June 2019, the Joint Investigation Team report accused three Russian military intelligence ofﬁcers (GRU—*Glavnoe razvedivatelnoe upravlenie*) and one Ukrainian separatist leader of involvement in the shooting down of MH17, who will be placed on trial (most likely in absentia) in the Netherlands next year. A Bellingcat report issued at the same time provided details of 12 mainly Russian GRU ofﬁcers who were involved in the shooting down of MH17.

Hahn and Van der Pijl defend Crimea’s annexation by Russia. Hahn (p. 121) follows in the tradition of Russian and Western scholars writing that Crimea is ‘Russian’ because of its ‘several-hundred-year tradition of being a Russian land’. Such statements are made possible by ignoring the much longer history of Tatars in Crimea and adopting the Russian nationalist tradition of the ‘Russian people’ emerging in and adopting Orthodox Christianity in ‘Kievan Russia’. Ukrainians have no place in such a concept except as a branch of the ‘Russian people’.

President Vladimir Putin’s policies are described as ‘reactive and defensive’ and a ‘countermove to mitigate the loss incurred in and potential threat from Kiev’, which is a novel way to describe the

annexation of a neighbour’s territory (Hahn, p. 221). President Putin had ‘solid arguments’ for ‘Russian intervention in the crisis and especially in Crimea’ (Hahn, p. 237).

Sociological polls are cited to buttress arguments that a majority of Crimeans supported joining Russia. Van der Pijl (p. 40) writes that Crimea ‘never reconciled itself with its place in an independent Ukraine’. Hahn (p. 235) and Van der Pijl (p. 40) both draw on a 2008 Razumkov Centre poll cited very selectively in Richard Sakwa’s *Russia Against the West. The Post-Cold War Crisis of World Order*. In fact, the 2008 Razumkov poll, like many others, shows a confused and contradictory post-Soviet identity in Crimea and other Ukrainian regions. It does not show what all three scholars claim; no poll prior to 2014 showed a majority of Crimeans supporting positions that are usually rolled together under the label of ‘separatism’—that is, support for Crimea joining Russia or the creation of an independent Crimean state.

Van der Pijl describes Russian policies towards Crimean Tatars in glowing terms, when in fact Tatar and Ukrainian language, culture and religion are subjected to repression in Crimea. Van der Pijl writes that Russian policies are based on the ‘spirit of Soviet nationality policy’ and ‘internationalism and autonomy’ (p. 40), rhetoric still used in the Russian Federation, and he contrasts these with anti- Russian and ‘ethnic’ policies allegedly in operation in Ukraine. However, Van der Pijl is wrong both about the USSR—where Ukrainians were subjected to Russiﬁcation and de-nationalisation—and the Russian Federation, where Ukrainians, the second largest minority in the Russian Federation, have no linguistic, cultural and education rights, while Ukrainian Orthodox and Catholic Churches are illegal. In contrast, Russian speakers in Ukraine have far greater access to education, media and cultural products in the Russian language and the Russian Orthodox Church remains the largest religious confession in terms of the number of parishes it possesses.

Ukraine’s ‘artiﬁciality’ is a major theme for both Hahn and Van der Pijl. Devoting an entire chapter to the ‘Stateness Problem’, Hahn condescendingly writes that the ‘rump Ukraine’ (p. 288) ‘borders on becoming a failed state’ (p. 297). In writing ‘contemporary Ukraine’s territory was cobbled together by vicissitudes of history’ and ‘Ukraine’s shifting and often non-existent state and borders’, Hahn (p. 119) repeats catchphrases found in President Putin’s April 2008 speech to the NATO–Russia Council. National surveys undertaken by Ukrainian think-tanks and sociological organisations show a greater degree of national unity emerging in Ukraine. The Razumkov Centre think-tank has conducted many ethnic and linguistic surveys since the 2014 crisis and these have shown that 92% of the population identify themselves as ‘ethnic Ukrainian’ and only 6% as ‘ethnic Russian’ (amongst Ukrainians under the age of 30 the ﬁgure is even lower at 2%), a decline from 22% ‘ethnic Russian’ in the 1989 Soviet census. Based on a ﬁgure of 92% ‘ethnic Ukrainian’, Ukraine is the fourth most ethnically homogenous country in Europe.

Liberal criticism found in these two books belies the fact that they draw on traditional Russian nationalist and chauvinistic views of Ukraine and Ukrainians. Hahn agrees with Russian leaders that left- and right-bank Ukrainians and Russians are a ‘single nation’ ‘having common historical roots and common fates, a common religion, a common faith, and a very similar culture, languages, traditions and mentality’ (p. 176). Hahn’s book was published before ofﬁcial recognition of the autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine and Constantinople’s declaration of Russian Orthodox jurisdiction over Ukraine in the years 1686–2018 to have been ‘uncanonical’. Van Der Pijl (pp. 4, 38) writes that Russians and Ukrainians are practically one people while the population in Ukraine is divided between the ‘Russian–Ukrainian population’ in the south and east and ‘nationalists’ in the west who represent ‘two main ethno-political formations’. This division of Ukraine and view of Russian-speaking Ukrainians eager to live in the *Russkii Mir* (Russian World) was shown to be a myth when Putin’s *Novorossiya* (New Russia) project in southeastern Ukraine received low levels of support in 2014.

A descent into Russian chauvinism is evident when both authors discuss the Ukrainian language. Van Der Pijl (p. 40) is convinced that ‘all educated Ukrainians speak Russian’ because it is ‘the language of

education and media, including internet’. The Ukrainian language is ‘hardly developed as a modern language’ (Van der Pijl, p. 45).

Both books downplay external Russian involvement and describe the conﬂict as a Western-directed ‘civil war’. Hahn (p. 268) describes Russian forces in spring 2014 as ‘negligible’ and ‘non-existent’, and minimises Russia’s military intervention. Kyiv launched its ATO (Anti-Terrorist Operation) after Igor Girkin and Russian special forces invaded mainland Ukraine in early April 2014. Russia then directed the transformation of proxy groups into a Russian-led 35,000-strong and well-equipped army of two corps within Russia’s southern military district.

In writing ‘it is fundamentally a civil war’ Hahn (p. 270) views the war not as between Russia and Ukraine but as between ‘bad’ Ukrainian speakers and ‘good’ Russian speakers. West Ukrainian ‘fascists’ came to power in a *coup d*’*état* during the Euromaidan and made Russian-speakers a ‘stigmatised minority’ (Hahn, p. 45), closed down Russian-language media, and demonised President Putin. Between 70% and 80% of Ukrainians hold a negative view of Putin. Hahn and Van der Pijl ignore Ukrainian opinion polls showing that Ukrainians reject the claim that a ‘civil war’ is taking place in their country. A February 2019 poll by the think-tank Democratic Initiatives showed that 72% of Ukrainians believe Ukraine and Russia are at war, including 47% in eastern Ukraine and 62% in southern Ukraine. This is another reason why newly elected President Volodymyr Zelensky, who hails from the eastern Ukrainian city of Krivoi Rih, says that Ukraine is ﬁghting two wars—against corruption and with Russia.

Hahn writes that political forces opposed to the Euromaidan are not allowed to operate. Opposition Bloc (*Opozytsiynyy blok*) (the former Party of Regions (*Partiya rehioniv*)) has had a parliamentary faction since the October 2014 elections; the Central Election Commission registered seven presidential candidates from this party in 2014 and three in 2019. The pro-Russian candidate of one of the two wings of the former Opposition Bloc, Yuriy Boyko, leader of Opposition Platform–For Life (*Opozytsiyna platforma*–*za zhyttya*), came fourth in the March 2019 presidential elections. The pro-Russian oligarch Viktor Medvedchuk, a supporter of Opposition Platform–For Life, controls the television channels NewsOne, 112 Ukraine and ZiK.

A major bugbear in both books are what both authors deﬁne as ‘Ukrainian nationalists’. These are understood not in political science terms as extreme-right ethnic Ukrainian political parties and views, but rather in the Soviet and contemporary Russian deﬁnition encompassing all Ukrainian political forces which do not support Ukraine’s membership of the Russian World. In the Soviet Union, the term Ukrainian ‘bourgeois nationalists’ was applied to national communists, liberals and ethnic nationalists who were deemed to be anti-Soviet. Hahn and Van der Pijl, in a similar manner to the former USSR and contemporary Russia, deﬁne as ‘nationalist’ a disparate array of political forces (liberals, businesspeople who deﬁne themselves as centrists, centre–right and ethnic nationalists) who supported the Euromaidan Revolution and back Ukraine’s European integration. Both books use the Soviet and Russian deﬁnition of ‘Ukrainian nationalist’ rather than the political science term when deﬁning Orange and Euromaidan Revolution governments in such a manner. Hahn’s (p. 290) claim that ‘nationalists, ultranationalists, and neo-fascist parties’ won 44.6% of the vote in the 2014 elections can only be made by using non-political science deﬁnitions of ‘nationalism’. No nationalist party won seats in the 2014 elections because Ukraine has one of the lowest levels of electoral support for nationalist parties in Europe.

To vilify Ukrainian nationalists, Hahn and Van der Pijl support the ‘false ﬂag’ theory that nationalists, rather than security forces, killed protestors on the Euromaidan. This conspiracy theory, developed by Ivan Katchanovski (a Canada-based scholar who has been pilloried for pointing out holes and inconsistencies in ofﬁcial accounts of this episode, which still awaits full investigation) has been debunked by Ukrainian and Western journalists, Three-D Model research and academic studies. Nevertheless, Hahn (pp. 200, 201) writes that there is ‘no evidence’ of police shootings and security forces ‘seemed to demonstrate some restraint’, downplaying human rights abuses by the security

forces and Party of Regions vigilantes. One particularly brutal kidnapping by pro-regime vigilantes on the Euromaidan is described as a ‘faked’ abduction (Hahn, p. 218).

According to Hahn, the Odessa ﬁre on 2 May 2014, when 52 protestors died, was planned by Kyiv using ‘Ukrainian nationalists’ who were ‘disguised as civilians and pretending to be “separatists” who ﬁred at Ukrainians’ (Hahn, p. 109). Such ﬁndings are only made by ignoring the work of Odessa journalists and video footage and by not undertaking ﬁeldwork and conducting interviews in Ukraine. Hahn (p. 285) writes that the ‘deep political paralysis’ in Ukraine is ‘driven by the ultranationalist and neo-fascist wings of the Ukrainian polity’ which is contrasted with President Putin reining in Russian nationalists. This one-sided approach to the discussion of nationalism in the conﬂict ignores the inﬂuence of the neo-Nazi Russian National Unity (*Russkoe Natsionalnoe Yedynstvo*—RNE) holding leadership positions in the pro-Russian movements in the Donetsk People’s Republic and the inﬂuence of what Marlene Laruelle in a 2016 study describes as ‘brown’ fascist, ‘white’ pro-Tsarist

and ‘red’ pro-Soviet nationalists in the ‘Russian Spring’.

Van der Pijl uses conspiracy theories taken from Russian information warfare and social media, such as Russia Today, to promote his claim that MH17 was brought down by a Ukrainian–Western conspiracy, not by a Russian ‘Buk’ missile system sent as military assistance to pro-Russian groups in the Donbas. Van der Pijl also cites Wikipedia which, together with his use of non-scholarly Russian sources and social media, makes the book an unusual choice to be published by a prestigious university publishing house. The book is testimony to the unfortunate development of conspiracy theories spreading from social media into work that purports to be ‘academic’. Van Der Pijl’s book has too many mistakes on Ukraine and the crisis to list; just some of them include *chesno* translated as ‘garlic’ and ‘honesty’ (p. 165) when the Ukrainian word for garlic is *chisnyk*, Chernihiv described as a ‘western region’ (p. 249) when it is located in northeastern Ukraine, and western Ukraine described as ‘Catholic’ (p. 118) when in four out of its seven *oblasti* a majority of parishes belong to Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox Churches.

Hahn’s and Van der Pijl’s two books on the Ukraine–Russia crisis were written with an explicit agenda and belong to a growing group of work by Western journalists, public intellectuals and academics who blame the West for the 2014 Russia–Ukraine crisis, seek to exonerate Russia of any responsibility, and strongly assert that a Ukraine outside the Russian World is an aberration that is being aided and abetted by a joint conspiracy of ‘Ukrainian nationalists’ and the West with the aim of weakening Russia. Ironically, while claiming to provide a liberal critique of the Ukrainian authorities both authors in fact are doing the opposite by drawing on traditional Russian nationalist stereotypes of Ukraine as an ‘artiﬁcial state’ and Ukrainians and Russians as ‘one people’.

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Marlene Laruelle (ed.), *Tajikistan on the Move: Statebuilding and Societal Transformations*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018, xiii + 313pp., £75.00/$110.00 h/b.

THE BOOK FEATURES A UNIQUELY COHESIVE COLLECTION OF ESSAYS by well-known scholars of

Tajikistan, arranged in three sections. The editor’s introduction provides a foundational overview of the character and main topics of scholarship on Tajikistan, and the state policies that restrict scholarship today. The frank description of government dependence on Chinese investment, Russian security