



**When Empire Meets Nationalism. Power Politics in the
US and Russia by Didier Chaudet, Florent Parmentier
and Benoît Pelopidas (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009)**

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► **To cite this version:**

Samuel Lussac. When Empire Meets Nationalism. Power Politics in the US and Russia by Didier Chaudet, Florent Parmentier and Benoît Pelopidas (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009). *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, 2010, 4 (1), pp.99-100. halshs-00516902

HAL Id: halshs-00516902

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00516902>

Submitted on 22 Aug 2022

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Book Review When Empire Meets Nationalism. Power Politics in the US and Russia
By Didier Chaudet, Florent Parmentier & Benoît Pelopidas (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009,
pp. 226, ISBN: 978-0-7546-7805-2, £55.00)

Caucasian Review of International Affairs (CRIA), vol. 4 n°1, Winter 2010.

From the Iraq war in 2003 to the Russian-Georgian conflict in 2008, both neoconservative and neo-Eurasianist politicians have been held responsible for the recent power politics of Russia and the United States. After analyzing this issue in French in 2007¹ at the end of the presidential mandates of George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin, the English translation of the book² allows Didier Chaudet, Florent Parmentier and Benoît Pelopidas' work to reach a wider audience during the early days of Barack Obama's and Dmitri Medvedev's mandates.

The main argument of the book is to compare neoconservatives and neo-Eurasianists' worldviews and to confront the latter with the concept of empire. But in doing so, the authors also provide the reader with an in-depth study of these two political movements and of their impacts on the post-WWII foreign policy-making of Russia and the United States. The book is divided into three parts: the first one presents the genealogies of both neoconservatives and neo-Eurasianists; the second one confronts these movements to the notion of empire; and the third looks at how they position themselves regarding three main areas of Russia's and the United States' foreign policies: Islam, Turkey and Central Asia, and the Middle East.

Within this framework, the authors put forward an innovative study of both the neoconservatives and the neo-Eurasianists and of their concepts of empire. Five points should be highlighted. First, the authors are for the first time opening the "black box"³ of neo-conservatism and neo-Eurasianism. They not only present each movement's genealogy, they also detail their roles in U.S. and Russian foreign policies. In this perspective, the last part of the book is very useful in understanding how neo-conservatives and neo-Eurasianists and their supporters deal with Islam, Central Asia and the Middle East.

¹ Didier Chaudet, Florent Parmentier and Benoît Pelopidas, *L'empire au miroir : stratégies de puissance aux Etats-Unis et en Russie* (Genève, Paris: Droz, 2007).

² Chris Flower translated the book with the help of the authors.

³ This concept refers to the work of Graham Allison on foreign policy-making. See *Essence of Decision. Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971).

Second, with an transdisciplinary approach as a theoretical leitmotiv, the authors provide the reader with an innovative definition of the concept of empire based on Dante's works. Thus, "empire" is defined here as "the continuing actualization by a political community of the narrative of its historical calling; the above-mentioned community embraces the difficulty of an indefinite expansion of its domination over an ever increasing territory likened to the whole world, upon which it imposes peace and offers to join its project of transforming the world" (p. 78).

From this definition, the authors draw a third interesting, though somewhat paradoxical point: neither the neo-conservatives nor the neo-Eurasianists are imperial but rather pseudo-imperial. The empire both movements promote does not lead to the enlargement of the territories of Russia or of the United States. It is rather instrumental to and deeply associated with nationalism. Their imperial project is ethnocentric: its main aim is not to expand the borders but rather to protect and to safeguard them and the identities that are within these borders.

The authors then distinguish two kinds of nationalism that fit with the neo-conservative and the neo-Eurasianist projects. Following the Wilsonian legacy, neo-conservatives promote a pseudo-imperial nationalism that rejects "otherness" and aims to change the world. The neo-Eurasianists, by contrast, support a hegemonic nationalism that is more philosophical: its supreme aim is to defend the status quo once its ambitions (mostly the expansion of the nationalist ideas within a predefined zone) have been fulfilled.

One could assume that the way in which neo-conservatives and neo-Eurasianists deal with empire is different, somehow opposite. The talent of the authors is to demonstrate that, on the contrary, both are linked by a similar conception of empire, labelled as "the empire of *ressentiment*". Both have experienced traumatic events: the 9/11 terrorist attacks for the neo-conservatives and the "Colour Revolutions" for the neo-Eurasianists. After these events, both neo-conservatives and neo-Eurasianists became aware of the vulnerability of their countries. U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East and Russian foreign policy in the post-Soviet space – or at least the way in which their foreign policies are interpreted by the neoconservatives and the neo-Eurasianists – is directly derived from such an analysis.

Thus, Didier Chaudet, Florent Parmentier and Benoît Pelopidas provide us with a very insightful book. Based on innovative concepts, they offer an interesting study of the post-Cold War foreign policies of both the U.S. and of Russia. It also avoids one of the main

pitfalls often found in similar research, which is sometimes too didactic. Basing most of their analysis on primary sources and, at the same time, using a mix of academic references and popular ones (e.g. Dante, *Star Wars*), the authors develop very clear arguments in an easy-to-read way.

This book can be highly recommended to researchers working on the concept of empire or on U.S. and Russian foreign policies, as well as to readers outside academia who wish to know more about one of the two most important intellectual trends in the aftermath of the Cold War.