



Social Construction of International Politics: Identities & Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999

Ted Hopf

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In this deeply researched book Ted Hopf challenges contemporary theorizing about international relations. He advances what he believes is a commonsensical notion: a state's domestic identity has an enormous effect on its international policies. Hopf argues that foreign policy elites are inextricably bound to their own societies; in order to understand other states, they must first understand themselves. To comprehend Russian and Soviet foreign policy, "it is just as important to read what is being consumed on the Moscow subway as it is to conduct research in the Foreign Ministry archives," the author says.

Hopf recreates the major currents in Russian/Soviet identity, reconstructing the "identity topographies" of two profoundly important years, 1955 and 1999. To provide insights about how Russians made sense of themselves in the post- Stalinist and late Yeltsin periods, he not only uses daily newspapers and official discourse, but also delves into works intended for mass consumption- popular novels, film reviews, ethnographic journals, high school textbooks, and memoirs. He explains how the different identities expressed in these varied materials shaped the worldviews of Soviet and Russian decisionmakers. Hopf finds that continuous renegotiations and clashes among competing domestic visions of national identity had a profound effect on Soviet and Russian foreign policy. Broadly speaking, Hopf shows that all international politics begins at home.

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