

FOREWORD

This timely book discusses the causes, nature, and possible consequences of the on-going crisis in Ukraine. Produced by the Centre for Analysis and Technology (CAST), a nongovernmental organization [NGO] based in Moscow, *Brothers Armed* is an anthology of nine essays structured into four parts that, collectively, provides military context for and unprecedented detail about the events leading up to the Russian Federation's annexation of Crimea in March 2014. In a broader sense, it also provides context for present and future developments in the strategic contest between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. In terms of its structure and intent, the book is a logical and worthy sequel to *The Tanks of August*, a study that CAST published in 2010, which provided context for and unique details about the 2008 Russian-Georgian War.

Despite the absence of an introduction, the contents of *Brothers Armed* is evidence of the editors' obvious intent to provide sounder background information, greater balance and detail, more candor, and increased objectivity to a subject fraught with confusion, misunderstanding, and historical animosities. The lead essay sets this tone by explaining the tortured process extending from the 1950s through the 1990s by which Crimea ended up under Ukrainian control. As recent events elsewhere in the world attest, I infer from what the author implies that hastily reached decisions and lines drawn in euphoric periods seldom endure the test of time.

Ostensibly, the focal point of this book – and probably the section most interesting for readers – is Part III, which discusses the events leading up to the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in February and March 2014. The two essays devoted to this subject provide a cogent explanation of the role and importance of the Russian Naval Base at Sevastopol to the Russian Federation, as well as enlightening detail and often frank and even-handed judgments concerning the antecedents to Russian intervention, the military and political mechanics of the intervention itself, and the nature of and grounds for subsequent Russian annexation. As context for the Crimean crisis, in Part II, the editors devote five essays to military aspects of Russian-Ukrainian relations. Under the rubric of “The Picture of the Military Faceoff,” two essays describe the origins, development, and present state of the Ukrainian Armed Forces; three other essays do the same for the Russian Armed Forces.

Graphic, detailed, and often refreshingly candid, these essays portray a mosaic of failed military reform in Ukraine juxtaposed against hesitant, often flawed but increasingly successful military reform in the Russian Federation. As such, *Brothers Armed* develops themes that CAST has already investigated in *The Tanks of August* and its 2011 book, *The New Russian Army*. In particular, these essays provide fresh and significant details on military reforms, pertaining especially to new force structures, Russian special operations (spetsnaz) and airborne forces, the combat readiness of the Russian Army in peacetime, transition of the Army from peace to war, and new forms of warfare.

Thus, despite its seemingly narrow focus on the Russian annexation of Crimea, the book also addresses the far more vital subjects of the progress of military reform in Ukraine and the Russian Federation and, as its title implies, the on-going “crisis” between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. Set against the backdrop of failed military reform in Ukraine as described in previous essays, the book concludes with an interesting essay pondering how Ukraine can hope to prevail in its present state. It notes that “Ukraine now needs that [military] instrument to protect itself from a range of grave threats, chiefly from armed resistance of militants in the Donbas region and the possibility of Russia invading the mainland.” It goes on to conclude that “Ukraine should learn from others’ mistakes [meaning Georgia] and focus on the most dangerous threat, i.e. a full-blown Russian invasion.”

Because of its balanced organization and reasonable approach, *Brothers Armed* brings understanding, balance, candor, and relative objectivity to bear on a subject hitherto fraught with inaccuracy, irrationality, and hostility. This approach should be heeded by the parties involved, as well as states that are inclined to become involved.

In a far broader sense, while accepting this book’s premise that “hastily reached decisions seldom endure the test of time,” I suggest that geopolitical realities in today’s world confront the Russian Federation, the United States, and, to a lesser extent, Ukraine, with common challenges whose importance far outweighs the fate of Crimea or the eastern provinces of Ukraine. In fact, these realities argue that rather than “brothers armed,” the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation and Ukraine, together with those of the United States and others, would be better served to become “brothers-in-arms.”

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