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*BY RONALD MEYER*

# DECIPHERING RUSSIA AND THE WEST

## KIMBERLY MARTEN IN PROFILE

Russia is in the headlines now more than ever, thanks to Special Prosecutor Robert Mueller's investigation of President Trump, allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections, and issues of cybersecurity more generally. Kimberly Marten, Ann Whitney Olin Professor of Political Science at Barnard College, is now one of the go-to Russia experts for radio and television. Marten's big break came on the *Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (March 6, 2014), where she explored the reasons for Vladimir Putin deciding to risk so much on Crimea. More recent media appearances are clustered around Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's visit to Moscow: NPR's *All Things Considered* (April 11, 2017) and *Charlie Rose* (April 14). It's easy to see why Marten keeps getting invited back. She's good at taking large, complex issues, and breaking them down into bullet points. For example, from the *Charlie Rose* appearance on April 14, 2017: What does Putin want? Answer: (1) to remain in power; (2) to go down in history as the man who made Russia great again; (3) to be treated as an equal. Or: Putin is a tactician; someone who's reactive and opportunistic. As she put it in her article, "Putin's Choices: Explaining Russian Foreign Policy and Intervention in Ukraine" (*Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2015), Putin is a judo master, not a chess master. "Judo is about immediate tactics, not long-term strategy. A judoka walks into a room, sizes up the opponent, probes for their weaknesses, and tips the other off-balance in a flash—causing the opponent to fall from their own weight." Breaking down the narrative into manageable and memorable bytes, and having recourse to thumbnail psychological sketches, allows Marten to get her point across in the tight time frames of the fast-paced media.

Marten published an essay about Tillerson's visit to Moscow on *ForeignAffairs.com* on the same day as her *Charlie Rose* appearance, in which she concludes: "no one with any real knowledge of the situation had expected a major breakthrough in U.S.-Russian relations. The interests of the two countries simply fail to intersect on too many issues around the world." In July Marten published a piece in the Monkey Cage blog of the *Washington Post*, in which she gives Trump some pointers on Russia's very different style of negotiating ("President Trump, Keep in Mind That Russia and the West Think about Negotiations Very, Very Differently," July 25, 2017). Her five points, which might seem breezy on first reading, are grounded in decades of studying Soviet and Russian policy vis-à-vis the United States and personal

observations and interviews. I'll cite just two of the five: Moscow sees negotiation as a tool to serve its interests—and is happy to junk that tool if something else would work better; and Russians value *khitrost* (cunning or wiliness).

I do not wish, however, to give the mistaken impression that Marten has forsaken rigorous research. A partial list of Kimberly Marten's academic activities for 2017 would include articles in the *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, *Asia Policy*, and the *H-Diplo International Security Studies Forum Policy Roundtable*, and the publication of her special report, *Reducing Tensions between Russian and NATO*, for the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) Center for Preventive Action; invited talks related to the publication of her CFR report—in Washington, D.C. (with Alexander Vershbow, Harriman alumnus and former U.S. Ambassador to Russia); in Talloires, France, for a Center for Preventive Action workshop, *Managing Global Disorder*; and once again in D.C. for a group of Congressional staffers.

Marten is clearly at the top of her game and indulging the passions that got her into political science in the first place—namely, international security and foreign policy—and she enjoys it. Her interest in policy dates back to her high-school days, when she was on the debate team and won a speech event that gave her a berth at the national tournament. "I knew from a very young age that I was interested in policy. My dad traveled all over the world when I was growing up, so I knew that I was interested in international affairs and international relations. I give him a lot of credit for instilling in me the desire to see the world." Not only did her father, a research scientist for the U.S. Department of Agriculture and adjunct professor at the University of Minnesota, travel extensively, but he would also deliver a paper every four years at the International Grasslands Congress, which in 1974 happened to take place in Moscow, by chance concurrently with President Richard Nixon's historic visit. Following the conference, Marten's father traveled by bus to agricultural research stations throughout the Caucasus and came back with slides, which he shared with neighbors and family, as well as the observation that the further away people were from Moscow, the happier they seemed to be. Her father's trip to the USSR cemented her ambition to study foreign policy and international affairs with a USSR focus, which was natural given her desire to focus on military policy. Moreover, when this "Cold War baby," as she described herself for the Harriman Institute Oral History Project, was in college and graduate school, the Soviet threat was not only real but seemed intractable.





Camp Julien, NATO ISAF Peace Operation, Kabul, Afghanistan, 2004.

As a government major at Harvard University in the early 1980s, she was selected for a research affiliation with the Center for International Affairs, now the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs. She was also associate editor for military affairs for the *Harvard International Review*, an undergraduate journal, an early manifestation of her professional specialization. And it was at Harvard that she began her study of the Russian language, even though at the time she could not imagine that she would ever have the opportunity to conduct research in the USSR and interview people for her work. As a result, she studied Russian for two and a half years, with a focus on reading for social scientists, and admits that her speaking ability is not as good as her reading comprehension (which she continues to use in her research).

When we turned the conversation to her graduate years at Stanford she remembers being surprised that policy issues did not play a more pivotal role in graduate studies in political science, but went on to say, “I loved graduate school, and the reason I loved it, I think, was because I had very good mentors.” She also credits her good fortune in receiving predoctoral and postdoctoral fellowships at Stanford’s CISAC (Center for International Security and Arms Control). The weekly CISAC seminars that all fellows were expected to attend, on both policy/political science/history issues and technology issues, helped build a sense

of cross-disciplinary camaraderie. Marten also remembers with fondness the speaker series and graduate student conferences sponsored by the Berkeley-Stanford Program in Soviet International Studies, and the sense of lasting community that program built across the two political science Ph.D. programs.

Her Stanford adviser (and one of her chief mentors) David Holloway opened up what she calls “fantastic opportunities” to her and the other graduate students. One such opportunity was an invitation to be the graduate student rapporteur for a conference that led to the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities Agreement of 1989, an agreement brokered and signed by U.S. and Soviet military officers. William J. Perry, codirector of CISAC at that time and a defense industrial mathematician, engineer, and entrepreneur, had long been instrumental in bringing together the academic community and Silicon Valley. His connections with the defense establishment from his time serving as undersecretary of defense for research and engineering (he would later serve as secretary of defense under President Bill Clinton) were an engine for the meeting on the U.S. side, while Andrei Kokoshin, deputy director of the Institute for the USA and Canadian Studies in Moscow (and later first deputy defense minister under President Boris Yeltsin), helped bring together the Soviet delegation. The Soviet Air Force officer’s hat that is proudly on display

among other mementos in Marten's office is a souvenir from the dinner celebrating the conclusion of the conference, where all the Soviet military officers took their hats out of their bags and gave them to the Americans sitting next to them.

Surely this is one reason that Marten rues the breakdown of military to military talks now between the U.S. and Russia—particularly since there was a history of such negotiations even during the coldest days of the Cold War (for example, the Agreement on the Prevention of Incidents at Sea in 1972, reached on the sidelines of the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks). While conceding that it is unlikely that conversations today could have much immediate effect, she believes that the absence of military to military programs cuts out yet another source of information that could prevent inadvertent military escalation during a crisis with Russia, and that the incalculable value of getting to know your counterpart is lost.

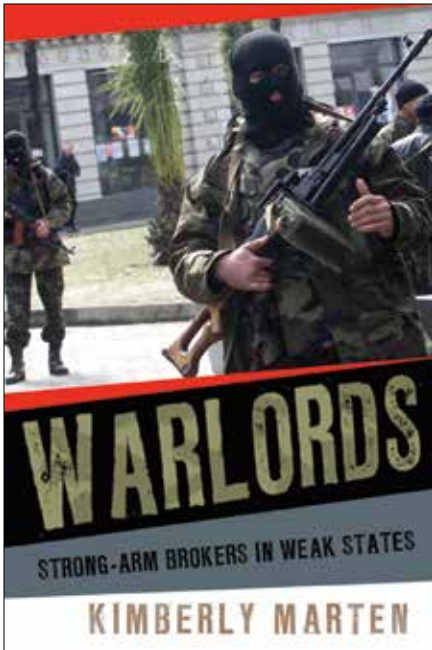
Her adviser David Holloway and Andrei Kokoshin also set up an informal exchange program between Stanford and the USA and Canada Institute, which allowed Marten to spend time in Moscow to collect materials for her Ph.D. thesis, “Soviet Reactions to Shifts in U.S. and NATO Military Doctrine in Europe: The Defense Policy Community and Innovation.” Kokoshin even helped her to set up interviews with retired Soviet general staff officers for her dissertation, which became her first book, *Engaging the Enemy: Organization Theory and Soviet Military Innovation, 1955–1991* (Princeton University Press, 1993), an examination of three historical cases of how the Soviet military reacted to changes in NATO doctrine. Marten's use of interviews is one of her signatures. As she remarks for the Harriman Oral History Project: “I've always interviewed policy people. And it's been a real benefit. I've gone all over the world and interviewed people in defense ministries and foreign ministries and policy advisers. I added it up once, and I think I've conducted interviews in twenty-eight countries.” The book went on to win the Marshall Shulman Book Prize of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (1994)—and Holloway would win the prize the following year for his historical masterpiece, *Stalin and the Bomb*.

For her second book, *Weapons, Culture, and Self-Interest: Soviet Defense Managers in the New Russia* (Columbia University Press, 1997), Marten went to Moscow for three months to research how Russian defense industrial managers were



Top to bottom: Central Armed Forces Museum, Moscow (1992?); Soviet Navy Museum, Leningrad (1989); VDNKh, Moscow (1989).





Left to right: Cover of *Warlords: Strong-Arm Brokers in Weak States* (2012); Tsar Cannon, Moscow (1989); taking part in a conference at the Harriman Institute (2000?).

adapting to the new market economy. Her trip included, of all unbelievable things, a visit to the arms fair in Nizhny Novgorod. Through CISAC she had also been given the opportunity to visit several Russian defense enterprises. At the time, everyone was talking about defense industry conversion, and trying to ply Russian defense technology in the civilian marketplace. Bill Perry was spearheading an effort to get Silicon Valley to talk to Russian defense industrialists and figure out ways to make conversion feasible. Marten learned from David Holloway about the opportunity to gain access to newspapers put out by defense industrial enterprises and the surrounding towns, including those like Arzamas-16 that were “closed” because of their nuclear materials production. She spent many days at Khimki (the Lenin Library’s newspaper library in the town of that name near Moscow), copying out extracts from the newspapers by hand, since this was before smartphones, and working photocopier machines were not to be found. Through a funny quirk of fate, she ended up renting an apartment from the son of a high-ranking engineer at a defense industrial plant, who also brought her internal newspapers from his own enterprise. And then, suddenly, without explanation, two months into her trip, she was

told that the newspapers at Khimki were “not available” any longer. As she flew home in November 1994, the state newspaper *Rossiiskaia Gazeta* published a story claiming that foreign scholars were collecting intelligence for the U.S. government about the Russian defense industry, under the guise of academic research. That put a quick end to Marten’s research trips to Russia for a while.

Consequently, her third book, *Enforcing the Peace: Learning from the Imperial Past* (Columbia University Press, 2004), investigates a topic unrelated to Russia. Instead, it focuses entirely on the policies of Western liberal democracies and their leadership of United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations in Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and East Timor in the mid- to late 1990s. The book touches on both postwar Afghanistan and the occupation of Iraq, with comparisons to the colonial activities of Great Britain, France, and the United States. Again, interviews with military officers and peacekeeping officials at the UN, NATO, and elsewhere provide examples for the various cases. For a project related to the book, she was able to be embedded briefly with the Canadian Armed Forces who were leading the NATO peace operation in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 2004, and to go out on several patrols with them.

For her fourth book, *Warlords: Strong-Arm Brokers in Weak States* (Cornell University Press, 2012), Marten returns to Eurasia for some of her case studies. Four case studies (Chechnya, Georgia, Pakistan, and Iraq) follow two explicitly theoretical chapters. One of its themes is that both the U.S. and Russia have chosen to work with warlords at various times and places. She was especially delighted to be able to spend time in Tbilisi and Batumi, Georgia, for her research on the book. Like most visitors to the country, she was wowed by Georgian wine, food, and hospitality.

The book was selected to be the subject of a roundtable in *H-Diplo/ISSF Roundtable Reviews* (2013). Henry Hale (at George Washington University) had this to say: “How can we understand the important phenomenon of modern-day warlords, often associated with state failure and transborder criminality, even as state leaders frequently rely upon them as a source of order or peace in the most difficult of conditions? Kimberly Marten’s *Warlords* blazes a new trail in answering this question. . . . This engagingly written book makes a number of major arguments . . . [that are] pioneering in the study of warlordism, likely framing a debate for years to come on a subject about which there is as yet relatively little theory.” Matthew Evangelista (at Cornell University), in the same roundtable, writes that Marten was drawn to the topic of warlords “by a concern for public policy, namely, observation that the United States and other countries were becoming increasingly dependent on ‘individuals who control small pieces of territory using a combination of force and patronage.’” In a profile published in *Barnard Magazine* (Fall 2015), she said that her findings and work on the book reignited her interest in Russia, and Putin in particular, whom she described as a “KGB operative who loves surprises.” She recognized that Putin’s system of corrupt patronage and control by informal networks dating from his KGB days bore a striking resemblance to the warlord politics she had studied elsewhere. The immediate payoff for the students was Marten’s retooled course “Russia and the West.”

Marten is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. She is also a member of PONARS Eurasia (the Program on New Approaches to Research and Security in Eurasia), designed to bring academic research on Russia and Eurasia into the policy mainstream, while creating new linkages between scholars from North America, Russia, and Eurasia. (The program was founded by Celeste Wallander, now president and CEO of the U.S.-Russia Foundation, whom Marten first met when they were both

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in graduate school. It has been funded for many years by the Carnegie Corporation, which has also generously funded Harriman’s Program on Russian Studies and Policy.) In an interview published in the September 2012 issue of the *Harriman News*, Marten states: “I’ve been a member of PONARS Eurasia since it was founded in the mid-1990s, and I [have served] on its Executive Committee. PONARS is a terrific organization that allows North American and Eurasian scholars to interact and connect. I’ve participated in PONARS conferences in Nizhny Novgorod, Odessa, and Moscow, in addition to ones held in the U.S.” Her most recent memo published by PONARS Eurasia is “The Security Costs and Benefits of Non-State Militias: The Example of Eastern Ukraine” (PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo 391, September 2015), and she will soon present a new draft memo on “Russia’s Schizophrenic Policy toward the United States” at an upcoming PONARS conference at New York University.

As far as the Council on Foreign Relations is concerned, Marten has been a member since her second year at Barnard, first as a term member and then as a permanent member. She held a Hitachi International Affairs Fellowship from the Council in 2000, during which she spent three months in Japan researching Japanese peacekeeping policy and the Japanese government’s ideas about the proper role of national defense in the country’s future. She has been an active member of the Council. She just completed a five-year term on the International Affairs Fellowship Committee and has appeared on several Council panels in both New York and Washington in recent years that have focused on Russia. As noted above, earlier this year she wrote *Reducing Tensions between Russia and NATO* for the Council’s Center for Preventive Action (Council Special Report, no. 79, March 2017), returning full circle to her dissertation topic of NATO/Russia relations, but this time attempting to give advice to the Trump administration on how to interact with Russia in the European theater. In one

section she presents four scenarios on “how a crisis might erupt.” I asked her if she particularly feared the possibility of one of them, and she answered almost without thinking that she worries most about what she calls “dangerous military activities,” which might be occasioned by the breaching of sovereign borders or airspace.

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In 1997, after a stint at Ohio State University’s Department of Political Science and Mershon Center, during which time she was also a visiting scholar at Harvard’s Olin Institute for Strategic Studies for a year, Marten came to Barnard College. She had contemplated (for the second time) trading in the academic profession for a career in law and had actually been accepted that year as a student at both Columbia and NYU law schools. Her visit to Barnard, however, and her interaction with the highly engaged Barnard women who asked great questions, changed her mind—and law school dropped out as an option. When asked about her teaching, she enthusiastically responds: “I love teaching. It’s the most valuable thing we do. I think of my media appearances as an extension of my teaching, to help a wider audience understand what’s really going on. The biggest joy I get is when I see the light come on in somebody’s eyes; when a student makes a comment in class discussion that you weren’t expecting and you know it’s brilliant. I think in some ways it’s more important than research in terms of its lasting value.” The queue for Marten’s office hours (for the past few years her office has been next to mine) more than adequately demonstrates that students remain her highest priority and how seriously she takes the role of teacher and mentor, surely to some extent as a way of acknowledging the support of her own mentors at Stanford.

Marten served as associate director of the Harriman Institute under Cathy Nepomnyashchy (2002–04), and as acting director in 2012–13, using her tenure in both positions to advocate for funding new initiatives for both undergraduate and graduate students. As associate director, she instituted the Harriman Institute Undergraduate Fellowship, of which she is particularly proud. She credits former Harriman director Bob Legvold for the idea. The fellowship is designed to provide research support to juniors and seniors who have a serious interest in the post-Soviet states and East Central Europe, to assist them in researching and writing their senior theses or to

complete an equivalent major research project. At the time, undergraduate students were not a visible contingent at the Institute. The fellowship has been an enormous success—and the undergraduate presence at Harriman has grown.

As acting director, Marten conceived and began to raise funds for the Civil Society Graduate Fellowship. This program is designed to support travel and living expenses for Columbia master’s degree students, allowing them to take unpaid summer internships at an international or nongovernmental organization that benefits civil society in any of the countries of the Russian, Eurasian, or East Central European region. Characteristically generous, Marten credits former Harriman program manager Lydia Hamilton for the concept.

Marten currently directs Harriman’s Program on U.S.-Russia Relations (PURR), now in its third year. PURR’s mission, in a nutshell, is to get as many people with expertise in Russia together, from the widest possible variety of life experiences and perspectives, to talk about what is and is not possible in U.S.-Russia relations. The program has hosted a variety of scholarly and policy conferences. Marten is particularly proud of two pieces of the program. First is the student forum, modeled to a certain extent on the Berkeley-Stanford Program, where students come together on a regular basis and choose their own visiting speakers from academia, journalism, business, and the policy world. The talks are attended by a core group of students, and there’s food, so the general atmosphere is more informal than the usual invited lecture. The student population is drawn from both undergraduate and graduate students at Barnard and Columbia, as well as New York metropolitan area graduate programs. The second piece is the relationship that Harriman has established with IMEMO (Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences), organizing conferences both large and formal and smaller and informal, held in Moscow and New York (and now funded by the Carnegie Corporation). The latest conference series is an attempt, as Marten put it, “to get younger scholars on both sides to know each other and share ideas.” Marten continues, “my hope is that when these people get to be at the peak of their careers, when they remember those connections, they can promote U.S.-Russia relations,” a sentiment that reflects her experience as a graduate student at Stanford and the desire for dialogue with Soviet counterparts. The Harriman-IMEMO joint conference, “Russia, the U.S. and the World: A Next Generation Policy Conference,” held



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at the Harriman Institute on March 31, 2017, is a good example of this spirit of cooperation (you will find the policy memos presented at the conference posted on the Harriman website).

Right now Marten finds herself between book projects. She thinks that Russia may be at an inflection point and is waiting to see what happens next before committing to the years it will take her to write a new book. For now she enjoys the freedom of working on smaller pieces; for example, an essay on the dangers posed by the Ukrainian volunteer militias, coauthored with Olga Oliker (published in the War on the Rocks policy blog, September 14, 2017). She also has a piece forthcoming in the *European Journal of International Security*, in 2018, that takes a new look at the NATO enlargement decision of the early 1990s and the Russian reaction to it (using, as always, her interviews with key members of the policy community on both sides), and asks at a counterfactual level whether a different outcome in the bilateral relationship was possible. Marten is working on two more articles—one on Putin’s policy decisions toward the United States, and another on the impact of Russia’s intelligence agencies on security policy. Even though she is currently on sabbatical, and finds herself speaking at conferences and other events around the country and abroad, she is a regular presence at the Institute, getting ready for the spring semester’s events for the Program on U.S.-Russia Relations and meeting with students. It will be interesting to see what comes next. ■



*Top to bottom: Lydia Hamilton, Masha Udensiva-Brenner, Eugene Sokoloff, and Acting Director Kimberly Marten at alumni reception in honor of Catharine Nepomnyashchy (2012); with Director Alexander Cooley and IMEMO participants of the Next Generation Conference of the Program on U.S.-Russia Relations (March 31, 2017).*