

**JOE** This is the MIT Alumni Books Podcast. I'm Joe McGonegal, Director of Alumni Education. My  
**MCGONEGAL:** guest, Eugene Rumer, PhD '88, is a senior associate, and the director of Carnegie's Russia and Eurasia program for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

His new book, *Conflict in Ukraine*, was published by MIT Press in February, 2015. In it, Rumer and co-author Rajan Menon take what they term a first cut at explaining the context, causes, and consequences of Ukraine in 2014.

Eugene Rumer, thanks for joining me. The book takes us through late fall, 2013, into nearly December, 2014. At which point I imagine you had to stop and go to press. Why pause and publish this book at this point?

**EUGENE RUMER:** It's not really intended as a chronology of the crisis. What we wanted to do-- my co-author Raj Menon and I-- is really a review of long term, and near-term, factors that got us to the point that we were at in September of 2014. So it's not a blow by blow account of the crisis itself.

Of course we couldn't avoid talking about the crisis, and the fighting, and escalation in Ukraine. But it really is a look at factors that shaped developments in Ukraine through those very turbulent months. So it's kind of a prelude to a crisis, rather than the crisis itself.

Why we stopped in September of 2014? Two reasons. One, of course, the production schedule. We had to get it done in order to make our publisher's-- MIT Press, I'm delighted to say-- timeline for releasing the book, as promised in February of 2015. Two, we felt that in September of 2014, we reached sort of a dead end in a conflict. Which has continued, obviously, past the Minsk Accords in September, but without a real resolution. So the conflict itself has sort of plateaued with parties not really sure as to what next move should be.

**MCGONEGAL:** And I'm so buried in the book at this point, I've completely forgotten what I've heard in the last few months. Would there be one more chapter that you would write? Or has everything in the last few months really been echoed in everything that was said?

**RUMER:** Well, you know, analysts are never content to stop at the point where they did stop. So of course I'd like to write more. But I think it's entirely appropriate for us to take the narrative to the second Minsk Accord to show, really, to the reader, that not that much has changed in the intervening months. That's one. Two, there is a lot more to be said about what the

consequences of the crisis have been for Ukraine, for Russia, for Europe, for the United States. And there is plenty of room to speculate about where we go from here. So all of these are not happy, but for an analyst like myself, appealing subjects to write on.

**MCGONEGAL:** Both of you write in the introduction, we are the single fact or fallacy, that it was all about oil and gas, or that it was all about pushing back from NATO, or pushing back from the EU. Since you wrote the book, since that deadline, has one factor risen above others? The psychology of that conflict?

**RUMER:** Well, now that you mention psychology, I would say that the one factor that, perhaps, we did not quite do justice to in the book-- and certainly, I think it has come out very visibly in the months since we finished the book-- is how unprepared everyone has been. And how everything that's been happening throughout these very turbulent months have really been a product of improvisation by most, if not all parties.

We tend to think about Mr. Putin, who is clearly the driver of events on the ground here, as someone who follows a well-developed, and well thought out strategy. And the more I look at what's happened in the past few months, the more I'm convinced that he's been in a reactive mode. Responding to circumstances on the ground rather than in the mode of pursuing a long, term well-thought out, deliberate strategy here.

**MCGONEGAL:** You must have had all of the same troubles analysts and journalists and news gatherers do in writing about this, and getting accurate information as the crisis was unfolding. Even going back 20 years to these four corrupt regimes, post-Soviet Union, getting accurate information about them.

**RUMER:** Surprisingly, there has been a lot written about these regimes. And over a period of 24 years since the breakup of the Soviet Union, and the emergence of independent Ukraine, the dossier on these successive corrupt regimes in Ukraine is really quite rich. There has been plenty written about it in the open press, both in Russia and Ukraine. As well as in the United States and elsewhere in English language publications. We probably didn't quite do justice to the material available to us, because we were in somewhat of a hurry.

And on the conflict itself, I think it's probably fair to say that the war in Iraq was somewhat of a turning point in war coverage by news media. Ever since the Department of Defense allowed the so-called embeds with the troops, the journalists to be embedded with troops. So I think we've seen some of this here too, because there's been some really good reporting done by a

variety of news publications from the front lines. And we've had, really, a lot, a lot of very interesting new material to work with.

**MCGONEGAL:** Tell me about your reaction to Boris Nemtsov's murder.

**RUMER:** I was shocked. I was shocked. And honestly, I was in a state of shock and confusion for some days. I'd met him. I didn't know him. But I'd met him. And he was a distinguished figure on the Russian political landscape, of course, even if he didn't have that much following in the past decade or so.

But what it tells us-- and it's something that is really new to our thinking about Russia, certainly to my thinking about Russia-- is that Russia is really not very stable. We tend to think about these kinds of situations happening in countries that don't have stable political systems.

Of course we are shocked, but we're not that surprised when an opposition politician, or just an otherwise unpopular figure, is murdered in Pakistan, because of the radical elements there, and the domestic instability. We just didn't think about Russia as being as dangerous a place for opposition politicians. Certainly establishment opposition politicians like Nemtsov was. Don't forget, he was a former Deputy Prime Minister. He was not just some fringe activist.

So this is a new situation in Russia, and I think it probably comes as a shock to many. Certainly we saw that in the demonstrations, in the march, the Sunday after he was killed. But I daresay it's probably a wake up call for some in the ruling circles as well.

**MCGONEGAL:** You got your PhD at MIT in 1988. How is your MIT education alive and well in this book?

**RUMER:** Good question. Of course I finished in 1988 when-- well even then it didn't look like the Soviet Union was breaking up-- well, soon after I started, let's put it this way, I found myself to be a failed Sovietologist. That said, the history of the place doesn't change. The analytical skills that we need to employ I don't change. My study of, at the time, in the Defense and Arms Control program, some of the fundamentals of nuclear strategy, and thinking about arms control, all that still comes in very handy.

And certainly I learned a lot from my thesis advisor, and longtime professor, Steven Meyer. Who unfortunately passed away some years ago. And I dedicated my portion of the book to him. Because that's where I really learn I have the ability to think critically, and to arrange my evidence in support of my analytical conclusions.

So certainly the six years spent at MIT were not six years of college down the drain, to borrow a phrase from the movie. I think about that time as, really, a time of learning. And really broadening my horizons.

**MCGONEGAL:** Do you look to other, either political scientists here, or thinkers, or other MIT professors, who've written books on topics around Russia?

**RUMER:** This now transcends the relatively narrow subject of Russia. We're in the realm of international relations. Someone whose writings I follow, perhaps not as diligently as I should, Barry Posen is someone who arrived at MIT, unfortunately too late for me to take a course with him, because I was well into my dissertation at that point. But I attended some of his lectures and I think that he is one of the more thoughtful and creative analysts of international affairs. And I try to follow him when he's in print or otherwise.

**MCGONEGAL:** And what else are you reading right now?

**RUMER:** Well I'm reading a lot of just current stuff. Because part of the job was really to keep up. And that's both English language coverage, as well as Russian. I don't really read Ukrainian.

And then I've been reading some of the history, 19th century history. I think there are probably some lessons to be learned there. For memoirs, I just read the memoirs of Talleyrand, the long time French Foreign Minister. I'm reading memoirs of Metternich now. I think there are some useful lessons there for the present moment. The trick is how to apply them.

**MCGONEGAL:** Chapter three, you have this paragraph about Putin's call for development of Russian technology to match imports, right? that nearly a quarter of the 200 defense related imports have been already matched. And that certainly gets one thinking about security in the region.

**RUMER:** Right. Well I'm of two minds on this one. On the one hand, I don't believe that Russia really is in a position to develop this indigenous, 21st century, defense industrial base, on a par with cutting edge technologies that are being developed by our leading defense companies. Clearly they have some very strong science and technology. But again, as the Russians say, it is no coincidence that they have not been able to develop their own defense industrial base. It's really just a function of money. But apparently difficult to do this in a closed environment like that.

On the other hand, I should say, Russia does have pretty robust defense industrial base. And

it has more than enough to deal with the threats as it sees them, or control the space around the periphery. Which it views as its primary sphere of interests. If you look at countries that border Russia, there are not many major military powers. After all, if you want to beat up with Georgia, it doesn't take a 21st century military. You can do it with some 20th century equipment, and do it quite well. The same appears to be true for Ukraine.

Probably the biggest challenge on Russian foreign policy in the long term, China. It's a challenge not only for Russia, I should say, but for other countries as well.

But in the near- and mid-term, I think they're making a deliberate strategic choice to pursue friendly, cooperative relations with China.

**MCGONEGAL:** Tell me what else excites you about your work of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

**RUMER:** Well Carnegie is unique in a number of aspects. Probably the most visible aspect is that we have several centers in Moscow. Carnegie Moscow Center, we have one in Brussels. We have one in Beirut. We have one in Beijing. And we're opening one in New Delhi.

The Endowment is not just a Washington base operation, but it brings in perspectives from all these very diverse regions. It's nonpartisan. And there's just really unlimited intellectual latitude to pursue things that I'm interested in. So when my co-author and I decided to write this book, I told my colleagues here that you won't see me for a couple of months. And they didn't. And this was just barely, what, three months into my time here. I left government service at the end of January. And four months later I basically went incommunicado, and worked on a book for a couple of months. There are not a lot of institutions that I know of that could just afford you that degree of flexibility.

**MCGONEGAL:** But Eugene Rumer's new book, *Conflict in Ukraine*, is available now online, or at your favorite local bookstore, and on Kindle. Eugene Rumer, thanks for joining me.

**RUMER:** My pleasure.