

International History

Academic year 2019-2020

The Soviet Union and Russia from Détente to the Syrian War, 1975-2015

HI127 - Spring - 3 ECTS

Course Description

The Soviet Union and Russia from Détente to the Syrian War, 1975-2015:

The course explores the motives and interests behind the international conduct of the Soviet Union and its legal successor the Russian Federation. The framework falls into four distinct periods: the peak of the Soviet superpower and its overextension during the 1970s; the period of reforms and unexpected collapse; the efforts of the Russian Federation to retain its great power status in partnership with the United States in the 1990s and the early 2000s; and a growing confrontation of Moscow with the US-led international order. The discussion will combine chronological and thematic approach, with a focus on "path dependency," construction of a great power ideology, and adaptation to international economy.

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Syllabus

Analysis of Russia's international conduct has been affected, in sequence, by Cold War fears, the enthusiasm for Gorbachev's reformism, the "transition to democracy" after the Soviet collapse, and the new apprehensions of Russia's authoritarian and illiberal trends. The annexation of Crimea in 1914 and the international conflict over Ukraine made many foreign observers concur on the "path dependency" of Russia's foreign policy: persistent factors that prevent this country from becoming a "normal" member of European and world community. The course challenges this consensus. It scrutinizes four periods of Soviet-Russian international behaviour, and explores key junctures of history when Moscow's modus vivendi changed remarkably and beyond expectations. The course takes advantage of massive new documentation that allowed researches to understand the other side's perspective: Moscow's policy decisions, economic dilemmas, political fears and cultural problems. In the focus of class discussion will be also ideas of power and security, international legitimacy and recognition, and the pressures of the increasingly global and competitive international economy. The background in Soviet and post-Soviet history is helpful, but not necessary.

Assessment

- 20% class participation: students must attend every session, prepare the reading assignments, and participate in class discussions.
- 30% one page written reviews of two secondary and one primary source selected by student from the syllabus or per discussion with the instructor.
- 50% final paper: around 12 pages.

Friday, May 8. Introduction.

Reading:

Alfred Rieber, "How Persistent are Persistent Factors?" in: Robert Legvold, ed., *Russian Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century and the Shadow of the Past* (Cornell, 2007), chapter 4.

Thursday, May 14. The Soviet Détente Deciphered

Reading:

Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire. The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (2007), chapt. 7
Svetlana Savranskaia and William Taubman, *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1962-1975*, in Melvyn P. Leffler, Odd Arne Westad, eds., *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. 2, p. 134-51

Friday, May 15. The Imperial Overstretch

Reading:

Bunce, Valerie, 'The Empire Strikes Back: the evolution of the Eastern bloc from a Soviet asset to a Soviet liability,' *International Organization*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Winter, 1985), pp. 1-46

Michael Cotey Morgan, *The Final Act. The Helsinki Accords and Transformation of the Cold War* (Princeton, 2018), chap. 6 and Epilogues.

Vladislav Zubok, "Soviet Foreign Policy from Détente to Gorbachev," in: Melvyn P. Leffler and Arne Odd Westad (eds.), *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol. III. Endings (Cambridge, 2012), p. 89-111.

Primary sources:

Anatoly Chernyaev, *The Diary of 1972 and 1978* (skim through this lengthy document written by a senior Soviet foreign policy expert, and compare how his expectations and moods changed; use key dates and words to search),

<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB379/1972%20as%20of%20May%2024,%202012%20FINAL.pdf>

<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4483853-The-Diary-of-Anatoly-Chernyaev-1978>

Thursday, May 21. Perestroika, Crisis, and the End of the Cold War

Reading:

Archie Brown, "The Gorbachev Revolution and the End of the Cold War," in: Melvyn P. Leffler and Arne Odd Westad (eds.), *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol. III. Endings (Cambridge, 2012), p.244-66.

Jacques Levesque, "The Eastern European revolutions of 1989," in: Melvyn P. Leffler and Arne Odd Westad (eds.), *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol. III. Endings (Cambridge, 2012), p. 311-32.

Vladislav Zubok, "With His Back Against the Wall: Gorbachev, Soviet Demise, and German Reunification," *Cold War History*, 2014, Vol. 14, No. 4, 619-645.

Primary sources:

Anatoly Chernyaev, *The Diary of 1987 and of 1989* (skim through and like in previous case, make comparison with expectations and assessments just in three years' time),

https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB250/Chernyaev_Diary_1987.pdf

<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB275/1989%20for%20posting.pdf>

Gorbachev-Bush memcon, Paris, November 19, 1990

<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=3402680-Document-18-Gorbachev-Bush-memcon-November-19>

Friday, May 22. The Soviet Collapse and Its Consequences

Reading:

Giovanni Arrighi, “The World Economy and the Cold War, 1970-1990,” in: Melvyn P. Leffler and Arne Odd Westad (eds.), *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol. III. Endings (Cambridge, 2012), p. 23-44

Alex Pravda, “The Collapse of the Soviet Union,” in: Melvyn P. Leffler and Arne Odd Westad (eds.), *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol. III. Endings (Cambridge, 2012), p. 356-77.

Mary Sarotte, “Perpetuating US Preeminence: The 1990 Deals to “Bribe Soviets Out” and Move NATO In,” *International Security*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Summer 2010), pp. 110–137

Primary sources:

Opening Session of the London Economic Summit, July 15, 1991.

<https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1991-07-15--Mitterrand.pdf>

[https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1991-07-15--Opening%20Session%20\[1\].pdf](https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1991-07-15--Opening%20Session%20[1].pdf)

“NATO Expansion. What Gorbachev heard,” the selection of documents at the National Security Archive

<https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2017-12-12/nato-expansion-what-gorbachev-heard-western-leaders-early>

Thursday, May 28. Russia’s transition and Western expansion.

Reading:

Andrei Kozyrev, “The Lagging Partnership,” *Foreign Affairs* (May-June 1994), p. 59-71.

M.E.Sarotte, “How to Enlarge NATO,” *International Security*, Vol. 44, no. 1 (Summer 2019), p. 7-41.

William C Wohlforth, Vladislav Zubok, “An Abiding Antagonism: realism, idealism, and the mirage of western-Russian partnership after of the Cold War.” *International politics*, vol. 54, no. 4, July 2017, p. 405-419.

Primary Sources:

“The Clinton-Yeltsin Relationship in their own words,” the White House memcons published and commented by the National Security Archive at:

<https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2018-10-02/clinton-yeltsin-relationship-their-own-words>

Friday, May 29. Russia’s road to Crimea and Syria

Reading

Bobo Lo, “Going Legit. The Foreign Policy of Vladimir Putin,” 2018 at:

<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/going-legit-foreign-policy-vladimir-putin>

Steven Kotkin, “Russia’s Perpetual Geopolitics. Putin Returns to the Historical Pattern,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2016

Eugene Rumer, “Russia, the Indispensable Nation in the Middle East,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 31, 2019 at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2019-10-31/russia-indispensable-nation-middle-east>

Primary Sources:

Vladimir Putin's Speech after the annexation of Crimea, March 18, 2014 at:
<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>