Shortly before his inauguration in January 1993, and barely a year after the collapse of the Soviet Union, President-elect Bill Clinton declared Russia “the biggest and toughest thing out there.” This would prove a prophetic judgment. In the three decades since the Cold War came to an improbably abrupt and peaceful end, the question of Russia policy has repeatedly confounded US leaders and policymakers—posing one of the most consequential and revealing tests of American power and leadership in the modern world.

The purpose of this seminar is to study the trajectory of US policy towards Russia over the course of the past 30 years—an arc of history that includes five presidencies, three Kremlin leaders, and the transformation of much of the planet. Our goal will be to understand both how we got to where we are now and where we are going—but just importantly, what that journey reveals about the character of American power itself.

Sunday, July 28, 2019

12:30 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. Opening Lunch: The Cold War’s Origins and Ending(s)

Readings:

- George Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” Foreign Affairs, July 1947
- Henry Kissinger, Diplomacy, Ch. 30
- Stephen Kotkin, Armageddon Averted, Chs. 1–3

Discussion Questions:

1. What was the Cold War? Why did it end? How did it end?
2. How does Henry Kissinger explain the end of the Cold War? What is the rival explanation offered by Stephen Kotkin? How did Kennan prophesize that the Cold War would end? Who is most persuasive?
3. What role did the U.S. play in the dissolution of the Soviet Union? How does Kissinger explain Reagan’s role? What are the implications of these different interpretations for America’s post-Cold War foreign policy?
4. How was the collapse of the Soviet Union experienced and perceived inside Russia? How did Russians explain what happened to their system and country?

2:00 p.m. to 2:15 p.m. Break

2:15 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. George H. W. Bush Policies toward Russia
Readings:

- Jeffrey Engel, *When the World Seemed New*, Chs. 16–18, 22–23
- Michael McFaul and James Goldgeier, *Power and Purpose*, Ch. 2
- Richard Nixon, “How to Lose the Cold War,” Memo, March 1992

Discussion Questions:

1. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, the Bush 41 Administration confronted a set of far-reaching decisions about the future of Germany, NATO, and Europe. What were the different visions put forward in 1990 by Bush, Thatcher, Gorbachev, and Kohl on Germany’s future? What was the debate among them? What path did Bush choose and why? Was he right?
2. How did the Bush Administration approach the contest for power between Gorbachev and Yeltsin in 1991, and the accelerating unraveling of the Soviet Union more broadly during that year? What was its response to the attempted August 1991 putsch? What were the alternatives? Do you agree with the choices it made?
3. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, what were the policies of the Bush 41 Administration towards newly-independent Russia? What were Washington’s priorities, and what did it choose not to prioritize?
4. What was Richard Nixon’s critique of this approach? Do you think it is fair?

6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.  Dinner: Visions of the Post-Cold War World

Readings:

- Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, Excerpt from Ch. 31, p. 813–26

Discussion Questions:

1. Kissinger and Fukuyama offer strikingly different predictions about what the post-Cold War future is likely to look like. What are their respective ideas? What are their respective implications for U.S. policy towards Russia? In hindsight, who made the better arguments? Who do you think was more persuasive at the time?
2. Anticipating Monday’s readings (hint: read ahead!), to what extent did the Clinton Administration follow either of these schools of thought in its own strategy and policymaking?

Monday, July 29, 2019

9:00 a.m. to Noon  The Clinton Administration (1993-2001)

Readings:

- Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, Chs. 2, 3, and 4
Discussion Questions:

1. The Clinton Administration came to office at a moment when the foreign policy framework that had guided the U.S. for the previous forty-plus years—the Cold War—was suddenly gone. What was the alternative vision it put forward in its 1994 National Security Strategy? How did Russia fit into that vision?

2. What were the instincts and policy priorities of the Clinton Administration towards Russia when it entered office? What was its strategy for pursuing them? To what extent did its approach differ from that of the George H. W. Bush Administration? What were the similarities?

3. Compare Strobe Talbott’s Washington-based account of Russia policy in the 1990s with Bill Burns’ account as a diplomat based in Moscow.

4. The U.S. had high hopes in the early 1990s for Russia’s evolution into a free market democracy. What went wrong? Who is to blame?

5. The Clinton Administration invoked a number of historical analogies to justify its Russia policy. What were they? What historical analogies did Russian leaders invoke to explain their experience in the 1990s?

Noon to 1:30 p.m. Group Lunch

1:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. The Clinton Administration, Continued

Readings:

The NATO Expansion Debate
• Angela Stent, The Limits of Partnership, Ch. 2

The Serbian Revolution

Clinton In Retrospect

Discussion Questions:

1. One of the major flashpoints between the U.S. and Russia during the 1990s was the question of NATO expansion. What were the arguments for expanding NATO eastward? What were the arguments against? What were the alternatives? Imagine yourself as a decision-maker at the time: which course would you have supported?
2. What was the impact of developments in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s on the trajectory of U.S.-Russian relations? How did Russia react to U.S. intervention in Bosnia in 1995 versus Kosovo in 1999? What happened in Serbia in late 2000?

3. By the end of President Clinton’s term in office, U.S.-Russian relations had deteriorated. Why did this happen, in your view? To what extent was this a failure of American policy? How should the Clinton Administration be assessed for its handling of Russia?

4. How do we assess the Clinton Administration’s management of Russia?

---

Tuesday, July 30, 2019

9:00 a.m. to Noon           The Bush Administration (2001–2009)

Readings:

- Condoleezza Rice, “Promoting the National Interest,” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2000
- Angela Stent, *The Limits of Partnership*, Chs. 3 and 5

Discussion Questions:

1. How does Condoleezza Rice, writing on the eve of the 2000 election, characterize the Clinton Administration’s approach to Russia in the 1990s? What approach does she advocate instead?

2. What does the Bush Administration adopt as its Russia policy upon coming to office? To what extent did its policy change after 9/11—and if so, how? What did Bush hope to achieve with Russia? How was the Bush approach to Russia similar or different from that of President Clinton? Did he succeed? Was it the right approach?

3. How does the 2002 National Security Strategy talk about Russia? What are its assumptions about Russia and its place in the broader international order? How are these similar or different from the Clinton approach?

Noon to 1:30 p.m.           Group Lunch

1:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.      The Bush Administration, Continued

Readings:

- William Burns, *The Back Channel*, Ch. 6
• “Russia’s Booming Economy,” The Economist, June 8, 2007
• Angela Stent, The Limits of Partnership, “Chapter 7: From Kosovo to Georgia: Things Fall Apart”
• William Burns, “Email to Secretary of State Rice—Russia Strategy,” February 8, 2008, The Back Channel
• Lindsey Graham and Joe Lieberman, “Russia’s Aggression is a Challenge to World Order,” The Wall Street Journal, August 26, 2008

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the reasons for the deterioration in U.S.-Russian relations under President Bush? Was this downturn unavoidable? What is President Bush’s explanation for what happened? What is Bill Burns? What is Angela Stent’s?
2. What are some of the key changes in Russia during the 2000s under President Putin, politically and economically? What happens in Chechnya?
3. What are the manifestations of Russia’s increased international assertiveness in the mid-2000s? Did this reflect a fundamental shift of Russian foreign policy outlook? What explains them? How did the U.S. react to these actions by Russia?
4. What were the causes of the 2008 Russia-Georgia War? What was the relationship between events in the Balkans, the earlier Color Revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia, and the conflict in Georgia? What was the role of the U.S. in the run-up to the conflict?
5. What are the competing views of the significance of the 2008 Georgia war offered by Kissinger, Stent and Lieberman-Graham? What are their respective recommendations and implications for U.S. policy following the war?

Wednesday, July 31, 2019

9:00 a.m. to Noon The Obama Administration, First Term (2009–2013)

Readings:

The Reset
• Michael McFaul, From Cold War to Hot Peace, Chs. 6–8
Russia: What’s Next? – Summer 2019

- “An Open Letter to the Obama Administration From Central and Eastern Europe,” July 16, 2009

Libya
- Steven Lee Myers, “The Real Story Behind Putin’s Syria Strikes: Inside the Kremlin Rivalry that Radicalized Russia’s Strongman,” Politico, October 1, 2015

Russian Internal Developments (2011–2012)
- Julia Ioffe, “Net Impact: One Man’s Cyber Crusade Against Russian Corruption,” The New Yorker, April 11, 2011
- Elise Labott, “Clinton cites ‘serious concerns’ about Russian election,” CNN, December 6, 2011

Discussion Questions:

1. What was the Obama “reset” with Russia? What were its goals? Did it accomplish them? What did it not seek to accomplish? What were the criticisms of the reset, and to what extent do they think are valid? What were the alternative approaches that Obama might have taken upon taking office? Why do you think he chose the path he did?
2. What was the domestic political and economic situation in Russia at the time that Obama entered office? How do you think that influenced Russia’s response to the reset?
3. What role did the 2011 war in Libya play in shaping U.S.-Russian relations? How did the Russian leadership view the U.S.-led intervention there?
4. How did domestic developments in Russia in 2011 shape the U.S.-Russian relationship? How did the Obama Administration react to the 2011 protests following the Duma election? Why do you think this was the Obama approach, and was this the right response?

Noon to 1:30 p.m. Group Lunch
1:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. The Obama Administration, First Term Continued
Readings:

US Human Rights Policy

Post-Reset Reflections… and What Next?
- Timothy Heritage and Steve Holland, “Russia Gives Snowden Asylum, Obama- Putin Summit in Doubt,” *Reuters*, August 1, 2013

Discussion Questions:

1. What were the arguments for and against the Magnitsky Act? How did the Obama Administration react to the proposed legislation?
2. U.S.-Russian relations had deteriorated by the end of Obama’s first term. Why? Do you think this was inevitable for the U.S., or was it the consequence of mistakes on the part of Obama? If so, what was the alternative approach?
3. What were the possible approaches towards Russia for the Obama Administration as it began its second term? What approach did outgoing Secretary Clinton recommend? What path did Obama ultimately pursue? Did it work?

Thursday, August 1, 2019

9:00 a.m. to Noon The Obama Administration, Second Term (2013–2016)

Readings:

*Syria Diplomacy and the Red Line (2013)*
Russia: What’s Next? – Summer 2019


**Ukraine Explodes (2013-2016)**
- David Sanger, *The Perfect Weapon*, Ch. 7 (“Putin’s Petri Dish”)
- “The European Reassurance Initiative,” CSIS Analysis

**Syria Escalates (2014–2016)**
- Jonathan Saul, “Russia Moves to Step Up Military Lifeline to Syria’s Assad,” Reuters, January 17, 2014
- Kathrin Hille, “Russia’s Middle East Ambitions Grow with Syria Battlefield Success,” *Financial Times*, January 19, 2017

**Russia’s (New?) Worldview and Strategy**
- Vladimir Putin, Speech to the UN General Assembly, September 2015
- Christopher S. Chivvis, “Understanding Russian ‘Hybrid Warfare’: And What Can Be Done About It,” Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, March 22, 2017
Discussion Questions:

1. What was Russia’s strategy in Syria from 2011 to 2014? What were its interests there? Conversely, how did Russia fit into the Obama Administration’s Syria policy, and how did Syria fit into its Russia policy? What were the alternative paths available to the Obama Administration? Why do you think it took the course it did?

2. What was the calculus behind the Russian offer to partner with the U.S. to remove Syria’s chemical weapons stockpile? How did the U.S. react? Was this the right choice?

3. What precipitated the crisis in Ukraine in late 2013/early 2014? What role did the U.S. play? Could the crisis have been averted? Was it foreseeable?


5. What is hybrid warfare? How does it work? How was it manifest in Ukraine in 2004 and Syria in 2015–2016?

6. Was Russia’s intervention in Ukraine a success, or a mistake, on Putin’s part? How should the answer to this question affect the U.S. response?

7. How did the Obama Administration react to the Ukraine crisis? How did U.S. allies react? What were some of the alternative policies it might have pursued, as described by Flournoy and Kissinger? Why did it pursue the path it did, as against the alternatives?

8. How did Russia escalate its involvement in Syria in late 2015? What was its strategy? Was it successful? Was Russia’s intensified involvement in Syria a sign of newfound strength or, as President Obama argued, an indication of weakness?

9. How did the U.S. respond to Russia’s escalation in Syria? What were the alternatives?

Noon to 1:30 p.m. Group Lunch

1:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. The 2016 Election and the Obama Legacy

Readings:

Russia and the 2016 Election
- David Sanger, The Perfect Weapon, Chs. 8–10

Four Views on “What Went Wrong”
- Michael McFaul, From Cold War to Hot Peace, Chapter 24 (“The End of Resets (For Now)"

Discussion Questions:

1. What were Russia’s reasons for its interference in the 2016 election? What was it trying to achieve? What precisely did it do?
2. How did the Obama Administration react to evidence of Russian interference in the 2016 election? What were the options available to it? Why did it pursue the path it did? Was this a mistake?

3. Mearsheimer, McFaul, Kotkin, and Kirchick offer competing explanations for, “What went wrong?” and, “Who is to blame?” in the collapse of U.S.-Russian relations between 2014 and 2016. What are their respective arguments? Who is most persuasive? If you are a U.S. policymaker, what are the implications of each analysis?

Friday, August 2, 2019

9:00 a.m. to Noon The Trump Administration and Beyond

Readings:

The Trump Administration’s Russia Policy
- Readout of President’s Call with Russian President Vladimir Putin,” The White House, January 28, 2017
- Philip Rucker et al, “Trump Administration Expels 60 Russian Officers…,” The Washington Post, March 26, 2018
- Courtney Weaver, “US Imposes Toughest Russia Sanctions to Date,” Financial Times, April 6, 2018
- “U.S., Russia Trade Threats on Syria Strikes,” The Wall Street Journal, April 11, 2018
- Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States
- Ryan Browne, “Trump’s Defense Strategy Sees China and Russia As Biggest Threats,” CNN, January 19, 2018
- “Donald Trump Calls for G7 to Readmit Russia Ahead of Summit,” The Guardian, June 9, 2018
- Yaroslav Trofimov, “At Putin’s Parade, Netanyahu Seeks Understanding on Iran,” The Wall Street Journal, May 9, 2018
- Ben Caspit, “US, Russian, Israeli Security Chiefs to Meet in Jerusalem,” Al Monitor, June 14, 2019
- Michel Duclos, “Russia and Iran in Syria: A Random Partnership or an Enduring Alliance?” Atlantic Council Report, June 2019
- Reuters, “EU Extends Economic Sanctions on Russia Until 2020,” June 21, 2019

Russia: What’s Next? – Summer 2019

*China-Russia*

*Closing Assessments*
• Edward Fishman and Mark Simakovskiy, “The Do-No-Harm Principle of Kremlin Relations,” *Foreign Policy*, July 6, 2017
• Angela Stent, *Putin’s World*, Chs. 10–12

**Noon to 3:00 p.m.**  **Group Lunch & Closing Conversation**