

MGIMO University
School of Government and International Affairs

Syllabus approved
Dean, The MGIMO School of Government and International Affairs
Mikhail Troitskiy
« » 2021

Russian Foreign Policy and National Identity in Historical Perspective

Undergraduate Course Syllabus

Instructor
Prof. Igor Zevelev

© Prof. Igor Zevelev, 2021

© MGIMO University, 2021

This syllabus is designed in accordance with the MGIMO Educational Standard for the Bachelor Program in International Affairs.

Author _____ Prof. Igor Zevelev

Director MGIMO Library _____ Marina Reshetnikova

PART 1: INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION AND COURSE DESCRIPTION

1.1 General information

- Full course title: Russian Foreign Policy and National Identity in Historical Perspective
- Type of course: Compulsory
- Level of course: B.A.
- Year of study: 3rd
- Number of ECTS credits allocated: 2
- Name of the instructor: Prof. Igor Zevelev
- E-mail: zevelev_i_a@my.mgimo.ru

1.2 Course aims and learning outcomes

This course will examine the Russian quest for a new national identity and its implications for foreign policy since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Concrete policies toward the United States, Europe, China, the Middle East, and the post-Soviet space will be examined from Russian national identity perspective.

National identities, as they are formulated at a given moment by the relative consensus within the elites, set certain limits to what can or cannot be done by policy-makers. Political leaders usually imply pragmatism within those limits. Following a constructivist approach, we will analyze national identity as a constructed, negotiated, manipulated response to a demand for a collective image. We will examine Russia's domestic discourses on national identity, particularly regarding beliefs about the self and the world and interpretations of historic legacies, and how these discourses have influenced foreign policy. The course is about how ideas embedded in Russia's imperial intellectual tradition help to explain contemporary foreign policy.

Throughout the course, foreign policy will be analyzed as continuous reinvention of states' self-definitions. In the process of international communication, the states talk not only to each other, but to themselves as well. Both foreign policy texts and actions are addressed as much to selves as to others. Russia's foreign policy is characterized by a combination of several narratives that coexist in a general space of rhetoric on identity, security, and civilizational divisions. Contemporary Russian foreign policy doctrine stems more from domestic ideas about Russian identity than from existing conceptualizations of the world order which have developed in the theory and practice of international relations. Drawing on theory of international relations and discourse analysis, the course will trace the role of domestic narratives in shaping international behavior to enhance our understanding of how and when major foreign policy shifts take place.

Russia's projected desired image, perception of the main trends on the world arena, and vision of the main threats and challenges have become intertwined with the discourses on historic sources of national identity to an extraordinary degree. In turn, Russian assertive foreign policy in 2012-2021 became the key building block in the national identity construction. These processes have led to the significant changes in the official rhetoric regarding international issues and have shaped policies towards the West and the post-Soviet space.

By the end of this course students should be able to demonstrate understanding of the sources of Russian foreign policy; explain the influence of domestic discourses on foreign policy; show continuity and

changes in Russian foreign policy in 1992-2021; understand the links between the Russian policies toward individual countries and the Euro-Atlantic security environment.

1.3 Course requirements and grading

Requirements

Students are required to attend no less than 80% of classes and be prepared for class discussions. Reading of the required materials and active engagement in class discussions are expected. Always read and think about assigned reading materials before class. Perceptive observations and thoughtful questions contribute equally to a good discussion. Be ready to discuss current events in Russian foreign policy. Each student will give a five-minute presentation. There will be two student presentations and small or whole-group discussion at each seminar class. There will be also a role-play game at one of seminar classes.

Grading

Final examination – 70%.

Three multiple choice tests – 15% (5% each test).

Class participation – 15%.

PART 2. COURSE CONTENT

2.1 Course content and readings by topic

Topic 1: Introduction to the Course. Does Russia Matter?

Introductions. Explanation of the aims and plan of the course. Clarification of requirements and grading.

Periodization of Russian foreign policy. The role of Russia in international relations in late XX – early XXI centuries.

What is power in international relations? How can we measure Russia's power today? Is Russia declining or rising? What does Russia matter?

Documents:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. *Article by Sergey Lavrov, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, "The Law, the Rights and the Rules.* June 28, 2021.

https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4801890 (10 pages).

Required readings:

Graham Allison and Robert D. Blackwill, "10 Reasons Why Russia Still Matters," *Politico*, October 30, 2011. <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/10-reasons-why-russia-still-matters> (2 pages).

Robert Legvold and Thomas Graham, "Location, Location, Location: Why Russia Matters," *Carnegie Corporation of New York*, October 19, 2016. <https://www.carnegie.org/news/articles/location-location-location-why-russia-matters/> (7 pages).

Topic 2: The Russian Quest for National Identity

Moscow has adopted three major narratives from Russian intellectual history to guide its actions at home and abroad. The first narrative describes an unchanging and unchangeable Russia and an uninterrupted flow of Russian history. The second narrative concerns Russia's relationship with the West and the unique role that Russian civilization plays in the world. The third narrative is grounded in the notion of a Russian World.

What is national identity? What is a civic nation? What is ethnic nationalism? What is the impact of historic narratives on contemporary Russian foreign policy?

Required readings:

Kari Roberts, "Understanding Putin: The politics of identity and geopolitics in Russian foreign policy discourse," *International Journal* 2017, vol. 72(1), pp. 28–55. (28 pages).

Dmitri Trenin, "Russian Foreign Policy as Exercise in Nation Building," in David Cadier and Margot Light (eds.), *Russia's Foreign Policy. Ideas, Domestic Politics and External Relations* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). (13 pages).

Andrei Tsygankov, *The Strong State in Russia: Development and Crisis* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). Chapter 13. (11 pages).

Recommended readings:

Bobo Lo, *Russia and New World Disorder* (London: Chatham House; and Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2015). Chapter 1. (34 pages).

Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud (eds.). *The New Russian Nationalism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016). Chapters 1, 2, 3, 9, 10.

Iver Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations* (New York: Routledge, 1996). Introduction, Chapters 3, 8, Conclusion. (63 pages).

Topic 3: Russian Foreign Policy Schools of Thought

There are at least three leading schools of thought in Russia: 1) "statists," or great power balancers; 2) pro-western liberals; 3) nationalists.

What was the balance between different schools of thought throughout post-Soviet Russian history? What is the present-day balance between different visions of Russia's foreign and security policy?

Required readings:

Fiona Hill, "How Vladimir Putin's World View Shapes Russian Foreign Policy," in David Cadier and Margot Light (eds.), *Russia's Foreign Policy. Ideas, Domestic Politics and External Relations* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). (22 pages).

Andrei Tsygankov, *The Strong State in Russia: Development and Crisis* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). Chapter 8. (12 pages)

Recommended readings:

Anne Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence: Aspirations, Identity and Security Interests* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009). Chapters 3, 4. (47 pages)

Topic 4: Russian Perceptions of the Post-Soviet Space

The image and character of the neighboring states is constructed in many different ways in Russia. They are presented simultaneously as independent states, culturally close and “fraternal” countries, parts of historic Russia, as potential members of a hostile military alliance (NATO), or as the states illegally holding pieces of land belonging to Russia. Russia’s goals in the post-Soviet space have been retaining its sphere of influence and minimizing the military and political influences of other powers. Have these goals been achieved? What are the main Russian national interests in Eastern Europe, in South Caucasus, and in Central Asia?

Required readings:

Dmitri Trenin, *Post-Imperium: A Eurasian Story* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011). Chapter 1. (42 pages).

Igor Zevelev, “Russia in the Changing Post-Soviet Space,” *Kennan Cable*, No. 61, November 2020. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/KI_201119_cable%2061_F.pdf (9 pages).

Recommended readings:

David Cadier, “Policies towards the Post-Soviet Space: The Eurasian Economic Union as an Attempt to Develop Russia's Structural Power?” in David Cadier and Margot Light (eds.), *Russia's Foreign Policy. Ideas, Domestic Politics and External Relations* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). Chapter 9. (18 pages).

Bobo Lo, *Russia and New World Disorder* (London: Chatham House; and Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2015). Chapter 4. (31 pages).

Dmitri Trenin, *Post-Imperium: A Eurasian Story* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011). Chapter 2. (60 pages).

Topic 5: Russia and Ukraine: New Historical Perspectives

Ukraine is the most important country among the Soviet successor states (and probably in the entire world) for Russia’s national security and national identity. Moscow conceptualizes and narrates the conflict not as a Russian-Ukrainian issue, but as a clash between Russia and the West on the territory of the Russian world.

Why is Moscow confident that the main goal of the United States and Europe in Eurasia is the containment of Russia? Why are Western policies seen as an attempt to deny Russia its historic mission and a role as a natural regional hegemonic power?

Documents:

President of the Russian Federation, Article by Vladimir Putin “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,” July 12, 2021. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181> (18pages).

Required readings:

Peace in Ukraine I: A European War. International Crisis Group Report, April 27, 2020.

<https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/eastern-europe/ukraine/256-peace-ukraine-i-european-war> (20 pages).

Recommended readings:

Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine. The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order* (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 2015). Chapter 3. (19 pages).

Topic 6: Russia and the United States: return to Cold War?

U.S.-Russia relations are at their lowest point in years. What are the reasons for that? How do Russia and the United States currently perceive one another from geopolitical and national identities perspectives? Are there any common features in Russian and American national identities? Why has it been so difficult for the United States and Russia to create a productive post-Cold War partnership? Is stable and predictable relationship possible?

Required readings:

Eugene Rumer and Richard Sokolsky, *Grand Illusions: The Impact of Misperceptions about Russia on U.S. Policy*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 30, 2021.

<https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/06/30/grand-illusions-impact-of-misperceptions-about-russia-on-u.s.-policy-pub-84845> (25 pages).

“Will Russian Behavior Toward the US/West 'Improve' When Putin Is Gone?” *Russia Matters*, August 11, 2021. <https://www.russiamatters.org/analysis/will-russian-behavior-toward-uswest-improve-when-putin-gone> (13 pages).

Recommended readings:

Bobo Lo, *Russia and New World Disorder* (London: Chatham House; and Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2015). Chapter 6, pp. 165-180. (15 pages).

Michael McFaul, “How Biden Should Deal With Putin. Summits Are Good, but Containment Is Better,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 14, 2021.

Angela Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014). Chapters 5, 6, 9, 11.

Ivan Timofeev, [Sanctions Against Russia: A Look Into 2021: Report 65/2021](#). Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), 2021. (18 pages).

Dmitri Trenin, [Has Biden made the Right Calculation on Russia?](#) Carnegie Moscow Center. April 27, 2021. (2 pages).

Topic 7: Russia: a Part of Europe or Apart from Europe?

Russia’s interactions with Europe and later with “the West” as a whole have been absolutely central for national identity construction. For a century and a half, a part of the elite has tended to define Russia in opposition to Europe, but another part of the elite has insisted on Russia’s belonging to Europe . Today, denial of the European nature of Russian civilization has become more popular.

What are Moscow's conceptions of Europe and its interactions with the European countries? What are the implications for Russia's relations with the EU and individual European countries? Why does Russia prefer bilateral relations with the European countries, not multilateral?

Documents:

Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council on EU-Russia Relations - Push back, Constrain and Engage (Brussels: European Commission, June 16, 2021). <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/joint-communication-eu-russia-relations.pdf> (12 pages).

Required readings:

Bobo Lo, *Russia and New World Disorder* (London: Chatham House; and Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2015). Chapter 6, pp. 180-200. (20 pages).

Ivan Timofeev, "Russia and the West: Are Values the Problem?" RIAC, July 13, 2021. <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/russia-and-the-west-are-values-the-problem/> (7 pages).

Recommended readings:

Vladimir Baranovsky, "Russia: A Part of Europe or Apart from Europe?" *International Affairs*, Vol. 76, No. 3, Europe: Where Does It Begin and End? (Jul., 2000), pp. 443-458. (16 pages).

Topic 8: Russia in Asia and the Middle East

As the Russian Empire spread to the East into the sparsely populated Siberian wilderness, Russia became less European and more Eurasian in terms of geography. However, culturally, it remained mainly European. The Russian Federation has long declared its own Asian pivot, yet despite deteriorating relations with the West, Russia has yet to prove it is at home in Asia-Pacific. At the same time, Russia has become an important actor in the Middle East.

Are there any features in Russian national identity that facilitate Moscow's policies in Asia-Pacific and the Middle East? Is Russia an Asian power? Why does Russia want a presence in the Middle East? Is Russia trying to replace the United States as the Middle East's main power broker?

Required Readings:

Bobo Lo, *Russia and New World Disorder* (London: Chatham House; and Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2015). Chapter 5. (33 pages).

Jon Hoffman, "Russia, the United States and the Counterrevolutionaries: A Trilateral Chess Match in the Middle East," *Russia Matters*, July 21, 2021. <https://www.russiamatters.org/analysis/russia-united-states-and-counterrevolutionaries-trilateral-chess-match-middle-east> (5 pages).

Topic 9: Review Session and Conclusions

In July 2021, President Putin signed into law the new National Security Strategy, the most important document of strategic planning, which replaced the previous version adopted in 2015. What can comparison of the two documents tell us about the evolution of Russian national identity? What new ideas about Russia's role in the world can replace the current ones?

Required readings:

Sergei Karaganov and Dmitry Suslov, "Russia in the Post-Coronavirus World: New Ideas for Foreign Policy," *Russia in Global Affairs*, May 17, 2020. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/russia-in-the-post-coronavirus-world-new-ideas-for-foreign-policy-66458/> (9 pages).

Simon Saradzhyan, "Russia's New Security Strategy: Deter US, Ignore EU, Partner with China and India," *Russia Matters*, July 15, 2021. <https://www.russiamatters.org/blog/russias-new-security-strategy-deter-us-ignore-eu-partner-china-and-india> (19 pages).

2.2 Recommended Primary Sources and Russian Publications

- President of Russia. All publications. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts>
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. Documents, statements, speeches. http://www.mid.ru/en/main_en
- The Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation. Documents. <http://eng.mil.ru/en/index.htm>
- Russian International Affairs Council. Publications. <http://russiancouncil.ru/en/>
- *Russia in Global Affairs* journal. <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/>

2.3 Recommended Websites

- Carnegie Moscow Center <http://carnegie.ru/?lang=en>
- Center for Global Interests <http://globalinterests.org/>
- Eurasia Daily Monitor <https://jamestown.org/programs/edm/>
- Johnson's Russia List <http://russialist.org/>
- The Moscow Times <https://themoscowtimes.com/>
- PONARS Eurasia <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/>
- Russia beyond the Headlines <http://rbth.com/>
- Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty <http://www.rferl.org/p/5547.html>
- Russia in Global Affairs <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/>
- Russia Matters <https://www.russiamatters.org/>