

CAS/PO-IR 364

THE POLITICS OF POST-COMMUNIST RUSSIA

Spring 2005

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Three-quarters of a century(1917-1991)bracket the birth, growth, decline and collapse of the Soviet Union. The world, and the ex-Soviet peoples, face today fifteen political entities emerged from the USSR's wreckage. The Russian Federation, heir to the largest-by-far share of the Soviet land area, resources, and population, is in economic, military and diplomatic terms the most consequential of these "successor states."

Over the decade-plus since January 1992, Russia's post-communist politics have been chaotic, crisis-ridden, marked by problems ranging from painful economic transition to national/ethnic secession at the periphery (Chechnya), from rivalries within the Moscow government to the tangle of a political party spectrum that has yet to become a "system," even after four (1993, 1995, 1999, 2003) parliamentary elections.

Thus, while 1991 represented a break with the Soviet past, it did not amount to an escape from the burdens of totalitarian tradition, the heritage of a unique anti-market economy, long-suppressed ethnic tensions, or a political culture far removed from that of "civil society." Russia's politics today are caught between the legacy of a past that extends from Lenin to the early Gorbachev era, and a future that holds as much uncertainty as clarity. This course deals with Russia's politics--and to a secondary degree with its major neighbors in the "Commonwealth of Independent States." After a brief review of the dynamics of the Soviet collapse in 1990-91 and the USSR's legacy, specific course concerns will focus on (1) the array of political forces contending over the direction and "fate" of the new Russia; (2) the new political institutions, executive and legislative, that have emerged since January 1992; (3) the "politics" of economic transition, privatization, etc., and (4) patterns and practices of Russian foreign policy toward the post-Soviet states of the "near abroad," the democratic West, and the world at large.

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COURSE REQUIREMENTS, in addition to regular class attendance and keeping up with the readings:

- a ONE HOUR MIDTERM (TUES MAR 22)
- a TWO HOUR FINAL (THURS, MAY 12, 9-11 am)
(make your departure plans accordingly)

These may mix essays with more "objective" questions: the midterm accounts for roughly one third of the course grade, the final for two thirds.

PLEASE NOTE that Russia and the other newly independent states are "moving targets"--things are happening, nothing stands still. More than in most courses, keeping current with what is happening is critical, and you are expected to do so. Given the nature of the course, the reading load is comparatively light. So--DO the reading, DON'T miss lectures; DO read a quality daily newspaper, AND a newsweekly (Time, Newsweek, USNWR). For the ambitious, by far the best newspaper-magazine combination is the Financial Times and The Economist--they're not just British, and they're not just for bankers and brokers.

READINGS:

The following two books are required

Timothy J. Colton and Robert Legvold eds., AFTER THE SOVIET UNION:
FROM EMPIRE TO NATIONS

Richard Sakwa, RUSSIAN POLITICS AND SOCIETY

AND, in addition, one book is recommended for those who have not had PO/IR 363--SOVIET POLITICS, 1917-1991--or a similar course, since 364 does assume some knowledge of the basics of the "old" Soviet political and economic system. This is

Stephen White, AFTER GORBACHEV

which is at present "back-ordered" by the bookstore. The publishers are saying it will be available and shipped by the end of January.

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- 1/18-20 INTRODUCTION
- 1/25-27 RETROSPECT: BREZHNEV'S REGIME, GORBACHEV'S REFORM
Sakwa, ch.1; those with little background
should also read After Gorbachev)
- 2/1-3 THE COLLAPSE: FROM USSR TO RUSSIA
C&L, chs. 1-2; Sakwa, ch. 2
- 2/8-10 BUILDING A NEW RUSSIAN STATE
Sakwa, ch. 3
- 2/15-17 RUSSIA: NATION AND FEDERATION
Sakwa, chs. 9, 11
- 2/24 THE PRESIDENT AND THE GOVERNORS: POWER IN MOSCOW AND
THE PROVINCES (no class Tues.)
Sakwa, chs. 5, 10
- 3/1-3 LEGISLATION AND CONTESTATION: PARTIES AND ELECTIONS
Sakwa, chs. 6-8
- SPRING BREAK**-----
- 3/15-17 NEW RULES, NEW MONEY: RUSSIA'S MARKET ECONOMY
Sakwa ch. 12
- 3/22-24 **TUES: midterm**
THURS: SOCIETY AND POLITY IN THE NEW ERA
Sakwa chs. 13-14
- 3/29-31 CIS-tology: WHAT IS A COMMONWEALTH?
Sakwa, ch. 16
- 4/5-7 END OF EMPIRE: TRAUMA AND OPPORTUNITY
C&L, ch. 3
- 4/12-14 FROM BELARUS TO KYRGYZSTAN: THE OLD UNION,
THE NEW PERIPHERY
(handouts)
- 4/13-15 FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY FOR A NEW RUSSIA
C&L, chs. 4-5; Sakwa, chs. 15, 17
- 4/26-28 PERSPECTIVES: WHERE IS THE POST-SOVIET WORLD GOING?
C&L, ch. 6; Sakwa, chs. 18-20
- 5/3 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

