Syllabus

Simple syllabus link here: https://tamu.simplesyllabus.com/doc/wodkjauw0/Fall-2026-College-Station-INTA-486-500-%2864597%29-RUSSIA-%26-FORMER-SOVIET-UNION?mode=view

Course Information

Course Number:	INTA 486
Course Title:	Russia and the Former Soviet Union
Section:	500
Time:	Tuesday/Thursday 10:05 AM – 11:20 AM
Location:	ALLN 1107
Credit Hours:	3

Instructor Details

Instructor:	Dr. Alexandra Chinchilla
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Office Hours:	Email for information

Course Description

Russia and the Former Soviet Union. (3-0). Credit 3. Investigation of how history, institutions, and political culture in Russia influences choices that elites and ordinary people make about politics; overview of Tsarist Russian imperialism, Soviet experiment in modernization and multinational governance, collapse of Soviet Union and creation of 15 independent states; examination of processes of political change and governance in post-communist Russia, and factors that influence processes.

Elaboration

This class examines Russian foreign policy since 1991 and how historical legacies shape Russia's presence on the world stage. Students will leave with an introductory understanding of the history that led to the rise of President Vladimir Putin and shaped Russia's current place in the international system, as well as how Russian foreign policy has evolved since Putin came to power. The class will outline three main analytical models for understanding Russian foreign policy: international systemic factors, domestic politics, and ideology. The class will also provide students with an overview of Russia's relationships with the West, Ukraine, and China.

Course Prerequisites

Prerequisites: International Affairs major; junior or senior classification.

Course Learning Outcomes

By completing this course, students will be able to:

1. Analyze Russian foreign policy through the theoretical frameworks of systemic constraints, domestic politics, and ideology, evaluating the explanatory power and limitations of each theoretical approach.

2. Trace the historical evolution of Russian foreign policy from the USSR's collapse through the Putin era, identifying critical junctures, contested narratives, and their lasting impact on contemporary Russia.

3. Assess Russia's bilateral relationships with Western powers, Ukraine, and China, analyzing how these interactions shape international order and regional and global security.

4. Critically evaluate conventional wisdom in the scholarly and policy communities about Russian motivations and foreign policy choices, determining which arguments are better or less supported by available evidence.

Textbook and/or Resource Materials

All course material is available via the Library course website for this course, which can be accessed via Course Reserves: https://library-reserves.library.tamu.edu/

Important resource: https://www.russiamatters.org Please read weekly.

Grading Policy

The following scale will be used for calculating final grades for this course:

- 90-100 A;
- 80-89 B;
- 70-79 C;
- 60-69 D;
- 0-59 F.

Assignments

Assignment	**Description**	**Due Dates**	**Grade**
Short response paper (2 pages single spaced)	Each student will choose a week from the class and write a paper on the reading from that week. The response paper will (1) elegantly and clearly summarize the reading and explain why it is important/what it tells us about the world, (2) provide original critique containing the student's well-reasoned opinion about the merits of the argument.	DUE before 10 AM on the day we discuss that reading. **Late papers will not be accepted.**	15%

Pitch (1 page)	Each student will write a one page summary of their research question, argument, and how it contributes to the knowledge of scholars and practitioners.	September 25	5%
Midterm exam	Student will respond to **two essay prompts** (2-3 pages each) selected from a list of 4-5 questions. Questions will ask you to synthesize course materials, evaluate competing historical narratives, and analyze the factors shaping Russian foreign policy.	October 15	25%
Long outline and Annotated Bibliography (4-6 pages single spaced)	(1) Write an extended outline for the final paper. (2) Gather sources for the paper – a mix of academic, policy publications, and news articles. Under each citation, include 1-2 sentences about how the cited piece is useful for you. *Example:* Frye, Timothy. *Weak Strongman: The Limits of Power in Putin's Russia*. Princeton University Press, 2022. Supports my argument that Putin is constrained by public opinion, as he seeks to remain a genuinely popular authoritarian leader.	November 6	15%
Final paper	**Goal:** Produce an academic research paper on some aspect of Russia in international politics. 10-12 pages double spaced. **Include footnotes**, **Chicago style.**	December 7	30%
Participation	Attendance, classroom discussion: Student will come to class prepared to comment and engage critically with the readings and in-classroom debate.		10%

Late Work Policy

- You have a 24-hour grace period. Following 24 hours, late submission of the written assignment will be penalized by 5% (based on a 100-point grading scale) for each day the paper is late beyond the 24 hours grace period.
- In exceptional cases qualifying for excused absences, an assignment deadline may be changed ***upon prior arrangement*** with the professor.

Work submitted by a student as makeup work for an excused absence is not considered late work and is exempted from the late work policy (Student Rule 7).

Course Schedule

Week 1: Tuesday, August 25 – Introduction: Legends, Men, and Myths

- Marlene Laruelle, Russian Studies' Moment of Self-Reflection. *Russian Analytical Digest*, 293, 2-3.

Week 1: Thursday, August 27 – Russia today

- Elena Kostyuchenko, *I Love Russia: Reporting from a Lost Country.* Penguin Press, 2023, chp 1-4.

Part 1: Legends (or, Contested Facts about the Past)

Week 2: Tuesday, September 1 – Legend #1: The USSR didn't lose the Cold War.

- Vladislav Zubok. *Collapse: The Fall of the USSR*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022, Introduction and Conclusion.

Week 2: Thursday, September 3 – Legend #1 lives!

- "Russian President Putin Delivers State of the Nation Address," April 25, 2005. https://irp.fas.org/news/2005/04/putin042505.html

Week 3: Tuesday, September 8 – Legend #2: The West promised not to expand NATO.

- Sarotte, Mary Elise. *Not One Inch: America, Russia, and the Making of Post-Cold War Stalemate*. Yale University Press, 2021, Introduction.

Week 3: Thursday, September 8 – Legend #2 lives!

- Shifrinson, Joshua R. Itzkowitz. "Put it in Writing: How the West Broke Its Promise to Moscow." October 29, 2014. *Foreign Affairs.* https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2014-10-29/put-it-writing

Week 4: Tuesday, September 15 – Legend #3: Putin saved Russia from the humiliating 1990s.

- Michael Cox, 'Who Lost Russia? The 1990s Revisited', in G John Ikenberry, and Peter Trubowitz (eds), *Rethinking the 1990s: Liberal World Order-Building in the Aftermath of the Cold War* (New York, NY, 2025; online edn, Oxford Academic, 22 Sept. 2025), https://doi.org/10.1093/9780197813133.003.0007.

Week 4: Thursday, September 15 – Legend #3 lives!

- David Shimer, "Election meddling in Russia: When Boris Yeltsin asked Bill Clinton for help." *Washington Post.* June 26, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2020/06/26/russian-election-interference-meddling/#
- Andrei Zavadski, "(Mis) Remembering 1990s Russia," Riddle, February 21 2025, https://ridl.io/mis-remembering-1990s-russia/

Part 2: Men (or, The People Who Run Russia Today)

Week 5: Tuesday, September 22 – Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin

- Masha Gessen, *The Man Without a Face: The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin.* Riverhead Books, 2013. Prologue, Chp 1-3.

Week 5: Thursday, September 24 – How Putin reshaped Russia

- Michael McFaul. "Putin, Putinism, and the Domestic Determinants of Russian Foreign Policy." *International Security* 2020; 45 (2): 95–139.

Week 6: Tuesday, September 29 – The Elites (Identity)

- Dmitry Gorenburg, "The Political Elite Under Putin," *Marshall Center Security Insight*, no.53 (April 2020): https://www.marshallcenter.org/en/publications/security-insights/political-elite-under-putin-0.

Week 6: Thursday, October 1 – The Elites (Behavior)

- SZAKONYI D. Corruption and Co-Optation in Autocracy: Evidence from Russia. *American Political Science Review*. 2025;119(1):402-419. doi:10.1017/S0003055424000340
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Week 7: Tuesday, October 6 – The People

- Joshua Yaffa, *Between Two Fires: Truth, Ambition, and Compromise in Putin's Russia.* Tim Duggan Books, 2020. Introduction.

Week 7: Thursday, October 6 – The People and the Special Military Operation

- Kier Giles, "Ukraine Isn't Putin's War—It's Russia's War." *Foreign Policy*, February 21, 2024. https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/02/21/ukraine-putin-war-russia-public-opinion-history/.

Week 8: Tuesday, October 13 – The Mercenaries

- John Lechner, *Death is our Business: Russian Mercenaries and the New Era of Private Warfare.* Bloomsbury: 2025, Introduction, Chp 3-4.

Week 8: Thursday, October 15 – MIDTERM EXAM

- No reading

Part 3: Myths (or, Evaluating Conventional Wisdom)

Week 9: Tuesday, October 20 – Myths # 1: Putin is all-powerful. (Domestic politics)

- Timothy Frye. *Weak Strongman: The Limits of Power in Putin's Russia*. Princeton University Press, 2021, Chp 1-3.

Week 9: Thursday, October 22 – Myths # 1: Putin is all-powerful. (Domestic politics)

- Examine Levada Center polling and come prepared with some insights that relate to the themes of Frye's book: https://www.levada.ru/en/

Week 10: October 27 – Myth #2: Russia is fascist. (Ideology)

- Yoshiko M. Herrera, "Who's a Fascist?" *Nationalities Papers* 50, no. 6 (2022): 1248–51. https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2021.103.
- Marlene Laruelle. *Is Russia Fascist?: Unraveling Propaganda East and West.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021, Introduction.

Week 10: October 27 – War and memory.

- J. Fedor et al. (eds.), *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-66523-8_1. Introduction.

Week 11: NO CLASS – Research Week

- Work on long outline due at 5 pm on Nov 3.

Week 12: Tuesday, November 10 – Myth #3: The West caused the Ukraine crisis. (International system)

- Isaac Chotiner, "Why John Mearsheimer Blames the U.S. for the Crisis in Ukraine," *The New Yorker,* March 1, 2022. https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/why-john-mearsheimer-blames-the-us-for-the-crisis-in-ukraine
- Michael Kimmage, *Collisions: The Origins of the War in Ukraine and the New Global Instability.* Oxford University Press, 2023. Introduction and Conclusion.

Week 12: Thursday, November 12 – War in Ukraine (Part 1).

- John J. Sullivan, *Midnight in Moscow: A Memoir from the Front Lines of Russia's War Against the West.* Little, Brown, and Company, 2024. Introduction and Epilogue.

Week 13: Tuesday, November 17 – War in Ukraine (Part 2).

- Dara Massicot, "The Lasting Wounds of the War in Ukraine." Foreign Affairs, March 18, 2026. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/lasting-wounds-war-ukraine.

Week 13: Thursday, November 19 – Myth #4: Russia will balance against China. (International system)

- Angela Stent, *Putin's World: Russia Against the West and With the Rest.* Twelve, 2023. Chps: Introduction, Epilogue.
- Alexander Gabuev. "What's Really Going on Between Russia and China: Behind the Scenes, They are Deepening Their Defense Partnership." *Foreign Affairs.* April 12, 2023.

Week 14: Tuesday, November 24 – The Future of Russia in International Politics

- Thomas Graham, *Getting Russia Right.* Polity Press, 2023, Chapter 7 and Epilogue.

University Policies

Attendance Policy

The university views class attendance and participation as an individual student responsibility. Students are expected to attend class and to complete all assignments.

Please refer to Student Rule 7 in its entirety for information about excused absences, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

Makeup Work Policy

Students will be excused from attending class on the day of a graded activity or when attendance contributes to a student's grade, for the reasons stated in Student Rule 7, or other reason deemed appropriate by the instructor.

Please refer to Student Rule 7 in its entirety for information about makeup work, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

Absences related to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 may necessitate a period of more than 30 days for make-up work, and the timeframe for make-up work should be agreed upon by the student and instructor" (Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.1).

"The instructor is under no obligation to provide an opportunity for the student to make up work missed because of an unexcused absence" (Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.2).

Students who request an excused absence are expected to uphold the Aggie Honor Code and Student Conduct Code. (See Student Rule 24.)

Academic Integrity Statement and Policy

"An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do."

"Texas A&M University students are responsible for authenticating all work submitted to an instructor. If asked, students must be able to produce proof that the item submitted is indeed the work of that student. Students must keep appropriate records at all times. The inability to authenticate one's work, should the instructor request it, may be sufficient grounds to initiate an academic misconduct case" (Section 20.1.2.3, Student Rule 20).

Texas A&M at College Station
You can learn more about the Aggie Honor System Office Rules and Procedures, academic integrity, and your rights and responsibilities at aggiehonor.tamu.edu.

Notice of Nondiscrimination

Texas A&M University is committed to providing safe and non-discriminatory learning, living, and work environments for all members of the University community. The University provides equal opportunity to all employees, students, applicants for employment or admission, and the public regardless of race, color, sex (including pregnancy and related conditions), religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, or veteran status. Texas A&M University will promptly, thoroughly, and fairly investigate and resolve all complaints of discrimination, harassment (including sexual harassment), complicity and related retaliation based on a protected class in accordance with System Regulation 08.01.01, University Rule 08.01.01.M1, Standard Administrative Procedure (SAP) 08.01.01.M1.01, and applicable federal and state laws. In accordance with Title IX and its implementing regulations, Texas A&M does not discriminate on the basis of sex in any educational program or activity, including admissions and employment. The following person has been designated to handle inquiries and complaints regarding the non-discrimination policies: Jennifer M. Smith, TAMU Associate VP & Title IX Coordinator at YMCA Ste 108, College Station, TX 77843, 979-458-8407, or email civilrights@tamu.edu. For other reporting options, visit https://ocrcas.ed.gov/contact-ocr to locate the address and phone number of the office that serves your area, or call 1-800-421-3481.

Civil Rights, Free Speech, and Title IX Policies

Texas A&M University is committed to fostering a learning environment that is safe and productive for all. University policies and federal and state laws prohibit discrimination and harassment based on an individual's race, color, sex, (including pregnancy and related conditions), religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, or any other legally protected characteristic. This includes forms of sex-based violence, such as sexual assault, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, dating/domestic violence, and stalking.

Students can report discrimination/harassment, access supportive resources, or learn more about their options for resolving complaints on the University's Civil Rights & Title IX webpage.

Students should be aware that all university employees (except medical or mental health providers) are mandatory reporters, which means that if they observe, experience or become aware of an incident that they reasonably believe to be discrimination/harassment alleged to have been committed by or against a person who was a student or employee at the time of the incident, the employee must report the incident to the university.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy

Texas A&M University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Resources office on your campus (resources listed below) Disabilities may include, but are not limited to attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability related needs with Disability Resources and their instructors as soon as possible.
To request academic accommodations, contact the designated ADA office based on your location:

- Texas A&M University, College of Nursing, College of Dentistry, Irma Lerma Rangel College of Pharmacy College Station, College of Medicine, School of Public Health, Institute of Biosciences and Technology, EnMed Program, Bush School in Washington DC, Mays Business School – CityCentre, TAMU Engineering Academies, Texas A&M University Higher Education Center at

McAllen and Texas A&M University at Galveston should contact Disability Resources at (979) 845-1637 or disability@tamu.edu.

If you are experiencing difficulties with your approved accommodations, contact the office responsible for approving your accommodations or the Texas A&M ADA Coordinator Julie Kuder at ADA.Coordinator@tamu.edu or (979) 458-8407.

Pregnancy Accommodations

Texas A&M provides reasonable accommodations to students due to pregnancy and/or related conditions, such as childbirth, recovery and lactation. Students should contact the University's Pregnancy Coordinator as soon as they become aware of the need for accommodation. Depending on the circumstances, accommodations could include extended time to complete assignments or exams, changes in course sequence, or modifications to the physical classroom environment. Texas A&M will also allow a voluntary leave of absence, ensure the availability of lactation space, and maintain grievance procedures to provide for the prompt and equitable resolution of complaints of sex discrimination. For information regarding pregnancy accommodations, email TIX.Pregnancy@tamu.edu.

Statement on Mental Health and Wellness

Texas A&M University recognizes that mental health and wellness are critical factors influencing a student's academic success and overall wellbeing. Students are encouraged to engage in healthy self-care practices by utilizing the resources and services available through University Health Services on its mental health webpage. The TELUS Health Student Support app provides access to professional counseling in multiple languages anytime, anywhere by phone or chat, and the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline offers 24-hour emergency support at 988 or 988lifeline.org.

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Students needing a listening ear can contact University Health Services (979.458.4584) 24-hour emergency help is also available through the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (988) or at 988lifeline.org.

Statement on the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

FERPA is a federal law designed to protect the privacy of educational records by limiting access to these records, to establish the right of students to inspect and review their educational records and to provide guidelines for the correction of inaccurate and misleading data through informal and formal hearings. Currently enrolled students wishing to withhold any or all directory information items can do so within howdy.tamu.edu using the Directory Information Withholding Form. The complete FERPA Notice to Students and the student records policy is available on the Office of the Registrar webpage.
Items that can never be identified as public information are a student's social security number, citizenship, gender, grades, GPR or class schedule. All efforts will be made in this class to protect your privacy and to ensure confidential treatment of information associated with or generated by your participation in the class.

Directory items include name, UIN, local address, permanent address, email address, local telephone number, permanent telephone number, dates of attendance, program of study (college, major, campus), classification, previous institutions attended, degrees honors and awards received, participation in officially recognized activities and sports, medical residence location and medical residence specialization.

Optional Syllabus Statements

Free Speech and Civil Discourse

Texas A&M recognizes that the pursuit of truth through open and robust discourse is critical to academic inquiry. However, as a community of scholars, the university has an aspirational expectation that such discourse will be conducted in accordance with Aggie Core Values. In this "marketplace of ideas," we encourage civil dialogue creating an environment that allows individuals to express their ideas and to have their ideas challenged in respectful and responsible ways. Students can learn more about Freedom of Expression and Free Speech on the University's website about the First Amendment.

Artificial Intelligence Statements

According to the Texas A&M University Definitions of Academic Misconduct, plagiarism is the appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results or words without giving appropriate credit (**aggiehonor.tamu.edu**). You should credit your use of anyone else's words, graphic images, or ideas using standard citation styles. Artificial Intelligence (AI) text generators and natural language processing tools (colloquially, chatbots - such as ChatGPT), audio, computer code, video, and image generators should not be used for any work for this class without explicit permission of the instructor and appropriate attribution. This includes, but is not limited to,

i. Creating or revising drafts
ii. Editing your work
iii. Reviewing a peer's work

This excludes pre-existing software additions such as spelling and grammar checkers, which are acceptable.