RUSSIA’S FOREIGN POLICY
GREAT DECISIONS
FOREIGN POLICY ASSOCIATION
BULVERDE, TX
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• In 1917, Russia’s transition to a market-driven, capitalist economy was only partial, and on different terms from what had transpired in North America, or Western/Central Europe over the previous century.

• From 1917-1991, with some brief exceptions, the Soviet Union (of which Russia was the most significant constituent) had a command or planned economy.

• In spite of what a number of informed commentators had argued at the time, the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989-1991 may not have signaled a “triumph” of Western values, so much as the final demise of the failed experiment that was communism.

• In 1991, whether at the government or private level, Russians had little, if any, experience with a “free market.”

• It has since been argued that free market values like unrestricted competition or “the invisible hand” did not coincide with basic notions of justice and fairness (and a communal sense of responsibility) that have been at the root of Russian culture during the Soviet period, and in fact, for centuries prior.
“What happened to the assurances our western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact? Where are those declarations today?” Putin said at the Munich Conference on Security Policy in 2007. “No one even remembers them. But I will allow myself to remind this audience what was said. I would like to quote the speech of NATO General Secretary Mr. Woerner in Brussels on 17 May 1990. He said at the time that: ‘the fact that we are ready not to place a NATO army outside of German territory gives the Soviet Union a firm security guarantee.’ Where are these guarantees?”

http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/newly-declassified-documents-gorbachev-told-nato-wouldnt-23629
Backdrop – Point 3
An increasingly emboldened West
NATO interventions since the end of
the Cold War

NATO bombardment of Serbian capital of Belgrade, 1999; NATO deliberately avoided a UN Security Council resolution, knowing that Russia would use its veto power. The actions seemed in the eyes of some to have exceeded NATO’s underlying mission.
Other Key Details of Potential Interest

Both of Putin’s older brothers died before he was born. His middle brother, Viktor, died during the Nazi siege of Leningrad during WWII (“The Great Patriotic War”). That same siege saw the city surrounded by hostile forces for almost 900 days, and possibly a quarter (or more) of the prewar population died.

Father served in both the Soviet navy and army during WWII

As a youth, Putin did not join the Young Pioneers (communist) youth organization.

After graduating law school, Putin served in the “Committee for State Security” (KGB) from 1975-1990. From 1985-1990, he served in Dresden, East Germany. Because of the recent reforms of Gorbachev, the role of the KGB by that time had become all but redundant.

On the day that the Berlin Wall fell, Putin was busy destroying secret documents.

Putin left the KGB for good on 20 Aug. 1991, during the ultimately unsuccessful hardline coup against Gorbachev.

While he has often been on record lamenting the dissolution of the Soviet Union (at least from a territorial standpoint), Putin has also said that communism was a “a blind alley, far away from the mainstream of civilization” (1999).

Today, the Communist Party is legal, but separate and distinct from Putin’s ruling “United Russia” party.
Throughout his term as President and/or Prime Minister (since 2000), Putin has been an advocate for Greater Russian nationalism, a force the Soviets often handled with conflicted ambivalence.

Putin has also been a strong advocate for the Russian Orthodox Church (a “pillar” of autocracy before 1917), which has seen a remarkable resurgence since he first took the reigns of power. (The Soviet Union was officially hostile to any organized faith community.)

Many of Putin’s foreign policy areas of interest - the Balkans, the Levant, the “near abroad” (Ukraine, Georgia, the Baltic states), or areas of the current Russian Federation inhabited by non-ethnic Russians (Chechnya) – were areas of traditional Russian foreign policy interest long before the Soviets.
August 2008 marked Russia’s intervention in Georgia

The current crisis in Ukraine dates to the ouster of Viktor Yanukovich (a Kremlin ally and an opponent of Ukrainian NATO membership) from the Ukrainian Presidency in February 2014
PUTIN AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

• Friend?
• Foe?
• Neither?
• The 2016 Presidential Election and its aftermath
DISCUSSION QUESTION 1

• In the 1990s, President Boris Yeltsin claimed that he wanted to lead a democratic Russia into the 21st century. His successor, Vladimir Putin, has repudiated the development of democracy in Russia and has worked to undermine (some) foreign democracies.

• What are some reasons for the ideological shift between the Yeltsin and the Putin years?

• What historical experiences might have shaped Russian attitudes toward democracy?
DISCUSSION QUESTION 2

• The U.S. and Russia have clashed over the ongoing Ukraine crisis and the Syrian civil war.
• What are the ramifications of these disagreements for regional and/or global security?
• Where, if anywhere, might the two countries find common ground on these issues?
DISCUSSION QUESTION 3

• In the foreseeable future, could there be another “Russian reset” like the one attempted in 2009 under the Barack Obama administration?

• Why or why not?
QUESTION 4:
SHOULD THE U.S. LIFT THE ECONOMIC SANCTIONS IMPOSED ON RUSSIA AFTER THE 2014 ANNEXATION OF CRIMEA?
HOW EFFECTIVE ARE SANCTIONS IN CHANGING RUSSIAN BEHAVIOR?

- Per Executive Orders 13660-13662 and 31 CFR part 589 (inter alia) the sanctions prohibit any U.S. citizen from investing in, exporting to, or importing from any area in Crimea.
- The sanctions apply to persons responsible for or complicit in, or to have engaged in, directly or indirectly any of the following:
  - Actions or policies that undermine democratic processes or institutions in Ukraine
  - Actions or policies that threaten the peace, security, stability, sovereignty, or territorial integrity of Ukraine.
  - Misappropriation of state assets of Ukraine or of an economically significant entity in Ukraine;
  - Subjects of "the sanctions" may include Russian government officials, or officials related to the Russian military, arms production, energy or financial sectors.
  - Sanctions include a “ban on provision of technology for oil and gas exploration, ban on provision of credits to Russian oil companies and state banks, travel restrictions on the influential Russian citizens close to President Yeltsin and involved in the annexation of Crimea.” The sanctions have since been extended to Russian citizens known to have interfered with the U.S. Presidential election of 2016

- [https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Documents/ukraine.pdf](https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Documents/ukraine.pdf)
Since assuming office, Putin has directed military operations in Georgia, Chechnya and Ukraine, but, aside from the annexation of Crimea, has stopped short of assuming direct control over these satellite territories.

How would you characterize Putin’s regional policy and what are his goals?
QUESTION 6

- The Cold War pit the U.S. and the Soviet Union against each other as adversaries, creating a bipolar world divided between capitalism and democracy in the West and communism in the East.
- How has the international order developed since the end of the Soviet Union in 1991?
- How do the Trump and Putin governments see the world and their respective roles in it?