ABSTRACT

An undergraduate American student who might find their way into my proposed class offering
"Introduction to Russian Politics 101" might be there because he or she is curious. They may need it to fill out their schedule or it might have been recommended. Most of these prospective students will be sorely lacking in basal knowledge of the political historiography necessary to understand the material involved.

The Cold War struggle between two huge global alliances, the Warsaw Pact and NATO, under the foreboding shadow of the constant threat of global nuclear war and nuclear winter, are not generally in the daily consciousness of today’s students; after all, that’s “ancient history.” How will I get them interested and focused? We will use two texts for the course: (1) *The Globalization of World Politics* by Smith and Bayless and (2) *The Visionary, The Custodian and the Russian Siloviki: A Russian Renaissance* by Terry Simmons. In addition, extensive use of periodicals and journals will supplement the texts. A primary source will be *Problems of Post-Communism*.

The historical references and indoctrination will be followed by a research project concentrating on the closer engagement of the Russian Federation and the European Union in the concept known as the European Home emphasized originally by Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980’s and current efforts by the FSU countries to fully integrate into the global economy via the western financial clubs. Poland will serve as our case study country. How Poland reflects the general fall and recovery of the pre and post 2007 Great Recession eastern European countries within the general framework of the post-communist community will serve as a course methodology. The interface of the former FSU space and its clientele states and the instrumentalities of the western institutions will direct our inquiries.
Introduction to Russian Politics and Political Economy in Post-Communist European Space

Intellectually, current American students are not oriented to foreign affairs as domestic economic issues have taken center stage in their lives. It will be my goal to reorient their parochially conditioned perspectives to the realities of global thinking. In the classroom this translates to linking pre and post 9/11 experiences and in particular, the evolving internationalism that has succeeded bilateral myopia and unilateralism.

Understanding the past will truly be the key to understanding the economics, politics and resulting sociologies of the current era. Removing the stubborn bias of pre-conditioned perceptions concerning the former Soviet Union and its coterminous Near Abroad is highly logical, co-opting Russian desires to integrate into the international political community and the international economic superstructure. Obsolete notions of a neo-containment of the Russian Federation are remnants of the Cold War struggle that have, indeed, been swept into the dustbin of history. Cooperative engagement woven into a new global vision of common cause is the obvious paradigm of the future for all political actors.

An international relations approach to this subject is based on several broad factors. Until recently, the present generation of undergraduate students in the United States in particular, has not been tuned in to the subject of Russia and the FSU (Former Soviet Union). After the fall of the USSR in 1991 and the subsequent end of the Cold War, Russian affairs have taken a decidedly back burner position in international politics. FSU issues, to include their former eastern European satellites, have been replaced largely by other macro-level complexities such as the radical Islamic political movements both state-centric and NGO jihadist phenomenon such as al Qaeda, Islamic Jihad and many others. Therefore, our collective attention has been focused on the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and now people’s uprisings and populist revolutions across the North African tier countries and the larger Middle East.

September 11, 2001 marked the beginning of a new American and NATO containment of Islamic jihad. It also ushered in the new politics of American restructuring of offshore-domestic politics and foreign policy. Russian-American relations were largely confined to the level of high politics with the
traditional strategic concerns with nuclear weapons. That relationship reverted to a largely bilateral interactive political engagement.

With the lack of focus on the previous bilateral Superpower contest that involved two global alliance structures, the American student in particular was not fed a daily diet of news and political science courses that immersed the previous generation. In 1980, not a day went by that the United States and the USSR were not prominently featured in the dailies, journals and in both undergraduate and graduate classes around the world. It was all consuming, particularly in view of the constant threat of a terminal thermonuclear conflagration.

What has changed? Russia is resurgent! The petro economy has breathed new economic life into the Russian Federation and her Near-Abroad. The Putin-Medvedev-Putin regime and their “law of democracy” Russian nationalism has revived the remnants of Russian empire. Though surely an illiberal democracy by any definition, the largely post-Communist Russian ideology is a practical nationalism based on recovery of the Russian space. Progress in these objectives was remarkable until the sharp economic downturn of 2007-2008. A global meltdown, perpetuated by the dynamics of globalization, hit the Russian Federation particularly hard due largely to the over concentration of the economy on oil. The former Warsaw Pact countries, even twenty years post Cold War, are now more closely associated with the European Union (EU) than the Russian Federation or FSU politics, receiving the benefits of Russian revitalization but also suffering in the general difficult recovery syndrome felt all over Europe and of course, the United States and Western Europe.

In the course I have proposed in this provocation/discussion, my students must understand the post Cold War context in which the course is set. Without this political historiography, the larger political-economic relevancies of the current international landscape have no frame of reference. Introduction to this course will make operational the examination of political economy using a classical case study approach as part of the overall academic conversation.

Poland has recovered most successfully and most dramatically from the Great Recession. The strong capitalist traditions of Polish business and its rapid post-Cold War adaptations to western political-
economic practices and to the new global interdependence realities, offer a fine example and case study for this prospective examination.

**POLAND**

**A Case Study**

Starting in 2007, essentially, the Great Recession as it was framed, engulfed the entire global economy. It was world-wide and dramatic. Its epicenter appeared to be the American economy, emanating from the melt-down of the housing market and supporting banking system. Deregulation of Wall Street as well as K Street led to uncontrolled speculation in all major sectors of the American economy and rippled internationally across the multinational superstructures of the global corporations. ¹

The repatriated eastern European economies, riding a boom period of growth post Cold War, began to convulse with the wave of panic that swept toward Europe, especially the systemically vulnerable former Soviet satellite economies. Following a collapse in confidence and global demand, Europe entered a deep recession, and risk deepened, especially taking a toll on emerging economies. “The economic downturn has become a global, synchronized recession…tighter financial conditions, falling wealth, and greater uncertainty have triggered a sharp decline across all types of demand.”²

Poland has withstood the European recession better than most. It is weathering the storm and recovering at a much faster rate than most eastern European countries especially closely linked to the demand economies of the former Soviet bloc as well as the EU directed economies post-FSU. “Compared with most other countries in central and Eastern Europe, Poland is expected to experience a mild

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² Ibid, 1
The global economic crisis hit Europe full force with trade and financial markets especially affected; Bulgaria, Romania and the Baltics have experienced particularly sharp declines. What factors have allowed Poland to ride out the storm so well? According to the supporting literature, Poland has sound policies. In addition, there is a past heritage and tradition of successful capitalism in that country. Integration with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), resulting in Flexible Credit Line, helped Poland to absorb the shock waves resulting from the global financial retrenchment. Imbalances experienced in the other eastern and central European economies were avoided. These have helped to cushion the downturn. This set of data helps to support the case study thesis that Poland has endured the crises largely due to being solidly anchored in the sound financial practices of the international financial capitalism community. Benefiting from extensive involvement with the western “clubs” insulated Poland from extensive economic-political damage. This is thematic for the course and is instructive for the students on several levels of analysis.

Finally

In an effort to coordinate all elements of the course, the course will reflect in the readings, both directed and inferential, the following: (1) A brief summary of the Cold War, (2) Satellite and Cold War history. (3) Post-FSU economic expansion and coordination of EU and Western integrations both economic and political. (4) Future predictability regarding total integration of FSU and eastern European political economies, (5) The effects of globalization on said integration factors.

The most obvious and intrusive bottleneck to this set of course objectives is to make the student recognize, in an holistic manner, both the integrative and non-linear elements of the attempt to bring cohesion to the myriad of complexities and disparate variables presented by the dichotomies of the political historiography of the region as well as the individualities of each country overlapping in both current and prior Zeitgeist.

4 Ibid, 1
5 Ibid, 1
To be appropriate to the undergraduate exposure to these subject areas, the instruction must be carefully interwoven through the thickets of text interpretation, provocative and inspiring lectures and collaborative selective readings as well as carefully monitored and guided group discussions. In addition, qualified guest speakers must be enticed to address this audience at the appropriate levels.