

Topics in Russia's National Security

Polina Beliakova, Ph.D. Candidate in International Relations,
Fletcher School, Tufts University
polina.beliakova@tufts.edu
polinabeliakova.com

What does the security landscape look like from the Kremlin's window? This class covers 12 topics in Russia's national security that help answer this question. The goal of this course is to equip students with essential knowledge about how officials in Moscow view threats and opportunities, identify security priorities, and decide which means to employ for their achievement. Actively engaging with the proposed topics will enable students to ask well-informed questions and make educated arguments about Russia's national security. Class materials include background readings and original texts or video coverage from Russian sources—the artifacts. Students will also learn some important expressions in Russian and key persons of Russia's politics.

Final grade composition:

Class attendance and participation (20%). It is a discussion-based class. Timely arrival, presence, and familiarity with all assigned readings are essential for the overall success of our learning experience. Students are expected to submit a google-form response after each class listing one most important thing they've learned and one question they still have on the topic.

Presentation on Russia's security toolkit (20%). For the week eight of the class students will work in groups of two or three to present a portfolio of one of Russia's security agencies. This exercise will help us better understand how Russia developed its security apparatus to respond to various threats.

Midterm Quiz (10%)

Class presentation Topics in Russia's National Security 2020 (20%). Students have to individually present a coherent argument (supported by evidence) that the topic of their choice will be important for Russia's national security in the year 2020. Time limit: 5 minutes.

Final assignment (30%). For the final assignment, students will develop their arguments about one topic that they think will be important for Russia's national security in 2020. The argument can be presented in the form of an academic paper or an op-ed/blog-post. Academic paper: 7-10 pages (12 Times New Roman, double-spaced), references to at least eight sources including three academic, and at least two of Russian origin. Op-ed/blog-post: not more than 2000 words, references to at least eight sources, two of which are "artifacts" (i.e., original Russian documents).

Books to buy: Colton, Timothy J. *Russia: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford University Press, 2016.

Class Outline

I. Introduction: Welcome to Russia

1. Finding Russia on a Map
2. Russia After the Cold War
3. Russia's National Security Strategy

II. Threats on the Borders

4. Russia's Sphere of Influence: the Near Abroad
5. Ukraine: What is Going on and why it Matters?

III. Internal Threats

6. Terrorism and Separatism
7. Corruption
8. Popular Protests

IV. Russia's Security Toolkit

9. Russia's Security Apparatus
10. Nuclear Weapons
11. Hybrid Warfare: Facts, Myths, Limitations
12. Information Warfare: Offense and Defense

V. Conclusion

13. Future Topics in Russia's National Security

I. INTRODUCTION: WELCOME TO RUSSIA

1. Finding Russia on a Map

How does geography shape Russia's security priorities? In this class, we will take a detailed look at Russia's neighbors, the seas and oceans Russia has access to, and natural resources available. Finding Russia on a map will help us understand how the combination of these factors affects Russia's security and threat perception. The chapters from Colton provide an answer to how did Russia get to its current size. Reading by Marshall discusses the geopolitical implications of Russia's geography. The artifact of this week demonstrates the reflection of Russia's geographical and historical greatness in its national narrative.

Readings: Tim Marshall. "Russia and the Curse of Geography." *The Atlantic*. October 31, 2015. [TEXT](#)

Colton, pp. 13-22. + Maps 1-5.

Artifact: National Anthem of the Russian Federation [VIDEO \(Rus\)](#) [TEXT \(Eng\)](#)

Word: Derzhava (держава)—a great power

Google-it: The map of Russia

2. Russia After the Cold War

What was the role of the entity we now call the Russian Federation in the collapse of the Soviet Union? This class highlights the implications of the end of the Cold War for Russia's international standing and explains why the concept of "multipolarity" in international relations became central in Russia's foreign policy. The artifact is a speech of Vladimir Putin (2007) that marked the Kremlin's anti-Western pivot and its strive for multipolarity.

Readings: Colton, pp. 85-101, 120-125, 166-171

Sarah Topol. "What does Putin Really Want?" *The New York Times Magazine*, June 25, 2019. [LINK](#)

Artifact: The Munich speech of Vladimir Putin (2007) [VIDEO](#)

Google-it: Evgeniy Primakov, Vladimir Putin

3. Russia's National Security Strategy

What factors constitute the major threats to Russia's security? Which of these threats come from international actors and which are internal? The study materials illuminate the broad range of phenomena that Russia's government considers fundamental for the national security of the Russian Federation.

Readings: Pynnöniemi, Katri. "Russia's National Security Strategy: Analysis of Conceptual Evolution." *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 31, no. 2 (2018): 240-256.

Artifact: National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation (2015) [TEXT](#)

II. THREATS ON THE BORDERS

4. Russia's Sphere of Influence: the Near Abroad

Russia's government claims to have an inherent sphere of influence — the “near abroad.” It is not mainly the geographic proximity that puts a state in this category. For instance, Moldova (that does not have a shared border with Russia) is the “near abroad” while Finland (which does) is not. How this conceptualization of the sphere of influence reflects on foreign policy and security considerations of the Russian Federation?

Readings: Gunitsky, Seva, and Andrei P. Tsygankov. "The Wilsonian bias in the study of Russian foreign policy." *Problems of Post-Communism* 65.6 (2018): 385-393.

Laruelle, Marlene. The ‘Russian World’: Russia's Soft Power and Geopolitical Imagination (Washington: Center on Global Interests, May 2015) [TEXT](#)

Colton, compare maps 3 and 5

Words: Russkiy (Русский) vs. Rossiyskiy (Российский)—Russian vs. Russia's

5. Ukraine: What is Going on and why does it Matter?

Why Ukraine is so important that Russia is willing to pay the price of international alienation and sanctions? The reading by Trenin discusses the general role of Ukraine in Russia's foreign policy before and after the Euromaidan crisis of 2013-2014. The chapter by Colton specifically focuses on the importance of Crimea for Russian identity and security.

Readings: Wood, Elizabeth. “Introduction.” In Wood, Elizabeth A, Pomeranz, William E, Merry, E. Wayne, and Trudolyubov, Maxim. *Roots of Russia's war in Ukraine*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

Musliu, Vjosa, and Burlyuk, Olga. "Imagining Ukraine: From History and Myths to Maidan Protests." *East European Politics and Societies* 33, no. 3 (2019): 631-55.

Trenin, Dmitri. "To Understand Ukraine." *Carnegie Moscow Center*. (2018)
[TEXT](#)

Artifact: Putin answers a question about opposition from a presidential candidate Ksenia Sobchak during annual media Q&A. *Russia Today*. (December 14, 2017). [VIDEO](#)

Google-it: What is happening in Ukraine these days?

III. INTERNAL THREATS

6. Terrorism and Separatism

Russia's security landscape involves a number of internal threats that challenge the stability of the regime. Separatist movements, terrorism, and mass protests are only some of them. This class is primarily devoted to Russia's concerns about security in the North Caucasus. Lipman's article outlines the broad spectrum of threats associated with this region. The reading by Dubnov discusses the current political arrangements aimed at managing stability in Chechnya. The article by Trenin places Russia's concerns about extremism in the broader context of international terrorism. The artifact demonstrates Vladimir Putin's reaction to one of the bloodiest terrorist attacks committed by Chechen militants.

Readings: Colton, pp. 112-117.

Lipman, Maria. "The North Caucasus: An Insurmountable Problem and Irresponsible Policy." *Carnegie Moscow Center*. (July 18, 2013) [TEXT](#)

Dubnov, Vadim. "Chechnya's New Contract With the Kremlin." *Carnegie Moscow Center*. (October 27, 2016) [TEXT](#)

Trenin, Dmitri. "Is Russia Safe From Extremist Attacks Like Those in Europe?" *Carnegie Moscow Center*. (August 12, 2016) [TEXT](#)

Google-it: Beslan terrorist attack

Artifact: The Beslan speech of Vladimir Putin [VIDEO](#) | [TEXT](#)

7. Corruption

Russian national security strategy names corruption as a threat to national security. What is the extent of corruption in Russia? How exactly does it endanger Russia's security? The report by Buckley paints a general picture of corruption in Russia. The report by Beliakova and Perlo-Freeman discusses how various forms of corruption affect Russia's defense industry. The artifact is an investigation by the Anti-Corruption Foundation headed by an opposition politician Alexei

Navalny that covers the corruption network organized by Russia's prime minister Dmitri Medvedev.

- Readings:* Buckley, Noah. "Corruption and Power in Russia." *FPRI*. (April 2018). [TEXT](#)
Beliakova, Polina and Sam Perlo-Freeman. "Corruption in the Russian Defense Sector." *World Peace Foundation*. (May 11, 2018). [TEXT](#)
Ivana Saric. "Russian Anti-corruption Official Jailed for Corruption." *Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project*. (June 11, 2019) [LINK](#)
- Artifact:* Don't Call Him Dimon [VIDEO](#) [OVERVIEW](#)
- Google-it:* Alexei Navalny, Dmitri Medvedev
- Word:* Otkat (откат)—kickback

8. Popular Protests

One of the Kremlin's primary state security concerns is destabilization of domestic affairs. In the past, popular protests were connected with elections and associated with the activities of political opposition. However, recent demonstrations were against corruption, unpopular pension age reform, mismanagement of landfills, and the use of torture by police. The political profile of the participants of these protests goes far beyond the Kremlin's liberal opposition and includes segments of the population that were traditionally supportive of Putin's policies. In this class, we will discuss the nature of the threat posed by popular protests and some means Russia's government deploys to tackle it.

- Readings:* Kolesnikov, Andrei. "What are Russians Protesting About." *Carnegie Moscow*. (July 15, 2019) [TEXT](#)
Stanovaya, Tatiana. "Protests Expose Russia's Regime Rivalry." *Carnegie Moscow*. (August 13, 2019). [TEXT](#)
Beliakova, Polina. "How does the Kremlin kick when it's down?" *War on the Rocks*. (August 13, 2019) [TEXT](#)
- Google-it:* Lubov Sobol, Protests in Moscow Summer/Fall 2019

IV. RUSSIA'S SECURITY TOOLKIT

9. Russia's Security Apparatus

To tackle the variety of threats to its national security, the Russian Federation developed an elaborate security apparatus involving multiple agencies. For this class, students will work in groups of two or three to develop a profile of one organization of their interest and presenting it

in class. The 10-minute presentation will include: the full name of the organization, who is it subordinate to, its missions and tasks, brief history, key officials, and the latest major appearance in the news (Russian or international).

Readings: Taylor, Brian D. "The Russian Siloviki & political change." *Daedalus* 146.2 (2017): 53-63.

List of organizations:

1. The Military (General overview)
2. General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (Genshtab)
3. G(R)U (Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation)
4. National Guard of Russia (ex. VV MVD)
5. Federal Security Service (FSB)
6. Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR)
7. Private Military Companies (e.g., PMC "Vagner")

10. Nuclear Weapons

The readings of this week discuss the role of nuclear weapons in Russia's current security thinking and elucidate how the legacies of the Cold War affect US-Russia relations on the nuclear front.

Readings: Adamsky, Dmitry. "Nuclear Incoherence: Deterrence Theory and Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons in Russia." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37, no. 1 (2014).
Veselovsky, Sergey. "Russia-US: Prospects for Strategic Arms Control." *Valdai Club*. (2018) [TEXT](#)
Legvolt, Robert. "Death of the INF Treaty." *Valdai Club*. (2018) [TEXT](#)

Google-it: What are the latest nuclear news from Russia?

11. Hybrid Warfare: Facts, Myths, Limitations

Some experts claim that Russia employs a new way of war—hybrid warfare. How does Russia's strategic community see this new way of war? What is "Gerasimov doctrine" and how serious should we take it? The readings of this week discuss Russia's thinking about "the new way of war" and debunk common myths about hybrid warfare.

Readings: Renz, Bettina. "Russia and 'hybrid warfare'." *Contemporary Politics* 22.3 (2016): 283-300.
Kofman, Michael. "Russian Hybrid Warfare and Other Dark Arts." *War on the Rocks*. (2016) [TEXT](#)

Galeotti, Mark. "I'm Sorry for Creating the 'Gerasimov Doctrine.'" *Foreign Policy*. (March 5, 2018) [TEXT](#)

Artifact: Valeriy Gerasimov. "Vectors of development of military strategy." *Krasnaya Zvezda* (March 4, 2019) [TEXT](#) [in Russian, translate it with Google Translate plug-in for Chrome]

12. Information Warfare: Offense and Defense

This class covers some approaches through which Russia tries to negate or mitigate information influence on its population (defense) as well as the methods with which it interferes in the information sphere of other states (offense). This week's reading begins with Artifact 1—the Doctrine of Information Security of the Russian Federation. The document outlines critical threats to Russia's information security as well as ways and means to tackle them. The readings discuss the examples of Russia's information warfare arsenal. Artifact 2 is a weekly TV-show appearance of Maria Zakharova—the Director of the Information and Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation—in response to the poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in the UK in March 2018. This piece provides an example of information defense.

Artifact 1: The Doctrine of Information Security of the Russian Federation. [TEXT](#)

Readings: Sanovich, Sergey, Denis Stukal, and Joshua A. Tucker. "Turning the virtual tables: Government strategies for addressing online opposition with an application to Russia." *Comparative Politics* 50.3 (2018): 435-482.

Applebaum, Anne. "The fake news Russians hear at home." *The Washington Post*. (2018). [TEXT](#).

MacFarquhar, Neil. "Inside the Russian Troll Factory: Zombies and a Breakneck Pace." *The New York Times*. (February 18, 2018). [TEXT](#)

Artifact 2: EXCLUSIVE: Maria Zakharova: West is Launching an All-Out Anti-Russian Campaign [VIDEO](#)

Google-it: Maria Zakharova, Yevgeniy Prigozhin

V. CONCLUSION

13. Future Topics in Russia's National Security 2020

Class presentations.