

Third Paper Topic – Current Events and Their Historical Roots

Your mission is to pick a current event or phenomenon (1999 to the present) and show both its significance and what might be its historical roots in the Soviet history we have studied this semester.

Below is a list of suggested topics you might consider. I have also listed a number of links to Internet sources you may find useful. In addition, I have also posted a number of “seed articles” on the class website under three rubrics: “Current Events and their Historical Roots”; “Ideas for last paper” (slightly older articles, but very interesting); and “Chechnya and Central Asia” (this barely scratches the surface of a fascinating area for research).

Your **third and final** paper (15 pages long) is due in class during Session 21. An excellent final paper will be one that uses a wide variety of sources, carefully culling data from them, and arranging it to form a clear analysis and argument. (Remember, as always, that your argument should appear in the first or second paragraph of your paper.) I recommend that, as you are doing your research, you create for yourself a timeline of key dates so you will be able to follow the changes you see. Where are the changes coming from? Who is initiating them? How are they being justified? Also be sure to avoid passive voice at all times. I want to hear who is taking the actions unless you absolutely cannot find that out. (You can include this timeline as an appendix to your paper if you like.)

Possible topics

1. Russian protests against Putin (2011 to 2012), sometimes known as the white or snow revolution
2. The Kremlin’s creation of an appearance of autocracy under Putin (1999-2012)
 - a. Putin has consistently denied that anyone is creating a cult of personality around him. Yet there are many signs of one. What can you find out about, for example, his use of masculine imagery and his stance as a strong and solo leader?
3. The election of President Dmitri Medvedev in March 2008
 - a. How did Putin’s naming of his successor in December 2007 compare with Brezhnev’s seizure of power in 1964, with Gorbachev’s accession to power in 1985 and Putin’s own accession to power in December 1999 as Yeltsin’s “heir”?
 - b. Why did the switch in Medvedev and Putin’s position (castling on Sept. 24, 2011) lead to protests?
 - c. The Putin-Medvedev tandem: how did they rule together?
4. The struggle between the Kremlin and former regions of the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe, forces pushing the regions apart, yet keeping them together
 - a. Pipelines, railroads, infrastructure
 - b. Currencies -which currencies in the C.I.S. are tied to the ruble and which are not?
 - c. Colored revolutions (Orange, Rose, Tulip, Maidan) – What has Russia’s role and reaction been?
5. Russia’s relationship with Ukraine
 - a. What was Russia’s involvement in the Orange Revolution in Ukraine and what is the Kremlin’s view of Ukraine today?
 - b. The arrest and imprisonment of Ukrainian leader Yulia Timoshenko
6. Russia’s response to the crisis and civil war in Syria (2011-present)
7. Russia’s responses to the events in Kosovo in 1999 (NATO bombings) and the establishment of Kosovo independence. How has the Russian state used pan-Slavic rhetoric?

8. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (signed in 1968): efforts today by the Obama administration to strengthen it, including discussions with Medvedev and Putin about cutting nuclear stockpiles
 - a. how do the efforts today relate to Khrushchev's and Brezhnev's efforts under the doctrine of "peaceful coexistence"?
9. The Kremlin's struggle for control in the Yukos oil case and the trial of Mikhail Khodorkovsky in 2004 and again in 2010/2011, 2015/16 – How does it compare to the show trials of the late 1930s ?
10. Russia's relationship with Iran - why has Russia been accused of supplying Iran with nuclear materials? What are the historical roots of this relationship?

Other possible topics

1. Politics
 - a. Creation of "parties" like United Russia which are really vehicles for the president himself
 - b. Increases in the president's powers from 1993 (under Yeltsin) through Putin's rule until today
 - c. Kremlin relations with the Duma (Parliament)
 - d. Kremlin relations with the governors
 - e. Kremlin relations with restive regions (Yakutia, Krasnodar, Tatarstan)
2. Economics
 - a. Controls over the oligarchs (some famous examples include Khodorkovsky, Gusinsky, Abramovich, Berezovsky)
 - b. The use of taxes as a way of reining in private companies
 - c. Centralization of banking
3. Media
 - a. Control over the television stations (particular stories might include NTV, Media-Most, ORT) and newspapers (Novaia gazeta, Moscow News, Kommersant)
 - b. March 2012 – restrictions on the independent radio station, Ekho Moskv
 - c. Restrictions on coverage of specific issues (the war in Chechnya, the school tragedy in Beslan in 2004, the war in Ukraine)
4. Judiciary
 - a. Public trials as show trials
 - b. Human rights issues
5. War and conflict
 - a. Use of wars as an excuse for centralization
 - b. Crackdowns on supposed "terrorists"
6. FSB and *siloviki* (military, secret service)
 - a. Roles of Putin's cronies from the secret services who have positions in government
7. Society
 - a. Creation of "Nashi" (Ours), a pro-Putin youth group
 - b. Right-wing nationalism
 - c. Hooliganism and hate crimes against peoples of certain nationalities
 - d. Crackdown on NGOs (non-governmental organizations)
 - e. Uses of the "law on extremism" and the foreign agents law as tools to crack down on critics

Links to Internet sources in English

1. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty - <http://www.rferl.org/>
2. Moscow Times - <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/index.php>
3. The Jamestown Foundation (an excellent source of information) - <https://jamestown.org>
4. <http://www.eurasianet.org/>
5. BBC, NYTimes, Washington Post, Guardian
6. Russia Press Digest
7. <http://www.russianews.net/>

Please be extremely careful to cite all of your sources. Plagiarism includes using another's arguments without acknowledging them, borrowing text wholesale, paraphrasing text in excessive quantity without attribution, borrowing someone else's arguments and merely rearranging them. Plagiarism of any kind will be severely punished, up to and including not only flunking the paper, but also having a letter placed in your file at the Institute.

There are two main reasons why I am strict about plagiarism: 1) This course is an excellent place for you to learn to hone your reasoning and writing skills. As with everything else in your education, the only way to do that is to do it yourself. I am committed to helping you in every way I can. 2) This course also contains a kind of contract between you, the student, and me, the instructor. I commit to give you my very best efforts – to be clear, smart, up-to-date, informative, and respectful. I expect you to do the same – give your best efforts and smarts, not borrowing anyone else's work without attribution. I have every confidence that you can do this.

The **Writing and Communication Center** offers MIT students free individual consultation about any writing difficulty, from questions about grammar to matters of style, including difficulties common to writers, such as overcoming writer's block, organizing materials, writing drafts, revising one's work, and making public presentations. You can visit the Center during any stage of the writing process: prewriting, writing a first draft, revising, or editing. The Center provides specialized help to those for whom English is a second language. I hope all of you will visit the Writing Center at least once during the semester and provide me with a written note to that effect.

MIT OpenCourseWare
<https://ocw.mit.edu>

21H.245J / 17.57J / 21G.086J Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society, 1917 to the Present
Spring 2016

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