Why use U.S.–Russia Relations: Quest for Stability in your syllabus?

This website is an extensive online resource for educators, students, researchers, and engaged citizens to examine the complex history and current challenges of U.S.–Russia relations, from interference in U.S. elections, to increasing risks of nuclear conflict, to China’s role in shifting the global centers of power and unrest and instability in the Middle East.

Deana Arsenian, vice president of Carnegie Corporation of New York’s International Program states in her website note on “Why Russia Matters”:

“Today, when Russia factors so profoundly in U.S. domestic politics, the U.S.–Russia relationship is at its lowest point since the end of the Cold War. Each country regards the other as an adversary and, at least in intent, as an existential threat.

The predominant view in the United States is that Russia is bent on damaging U.S. interests, undermining the international order, and sabotaging U.S. democracy. The dominant view in Russia is that the United States hampers Russia’s interests, exempts itself from the international rules of engagement, and wishes for “regime change” in Russia. These mutual perceptions are driving military postures and political actions in both countries vis-à-vis each other and their allies.”

Offering an interactive multimedia experience that features interviews with academic experts, U.S. and Russian government officials, policy analysts, journalists and private citizens, as well as published texts, factual analysis, interactive maps, and timelines, the site empowers students to explore the fundamental issues that underpin the relationship between the two nations from the perspectives of the United States and Russia.

The site offers first-person insights from the highest levels of diplomacy, such as former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, and many other military, economic, historic, and social science experts. The resources available are uniquely positioned to deepen a student’s understanding of how U.S. and Russian interests coincide and conflict, as well as the historical contexts for those interests, and allow students to draw their own conclusions about the role of these two countries and their relationship to urgent global challenges such as nuclear proliferation, terrorism, climate change, and more.

What courses does this content guide work for?

This study guide is a tool to help instructors integrate the content into their curricula or syllabi, and it is customized for three different discipline areas:

1. International Relations
2. History of Russia and the United States
3. Political Science/Politics/Peace and Conflict Studies
The content is also appropriate for high school students in three Advanced Placement classes:

- **AP World History**: World History, Unit Seven: *Cold War and Decolonization*. Students will use the skills of Contextualization, Making Connections, and Argumentation.

- **AP U.S. History**: Thematic Learning Objectives for Period 8 (1945–1980) and Period 9 (1980–Present). Students will use the disciplinary practices of Analyzing Historical Evidence and Argument Development for:
  - *America in the World 2.0* – Analyze the reasons for and results of U.S. diplomatic, economic, and military initiatives in North America and overseas.

- **AP Human Geography**: Students will use Scale Analysis skills to examine the Big Idea of Impacts and Interactions in Unit Four: *Political Patterns and Processes*.

**Note**: In addition to this study guide, there are also one-pagers available for the Timeline, Geopolitics, Military & Cyber, Energy & Economics, and Myths & Identity chapters that offer prompts to encourage students in any discipline to explore the chapter content extensively.

**How do I use this Content Guide?**

Each discipline area includes two sections:

1. **Seminar questions** are suggested for the higher education disciplines of International Relations, Political Science, and History. Instructors can ask for responses to seminar questions in forms most appropriate for their setting, such as classroom discussion or debate, and argumentative or analytical writing.

2. **A suggested content “playlist”** is provided for each seminar questions. Playlists are not comprehensive, but rather are meant to be entry points that engage students and encourage them to explore more thoroughly.

**Suggested Culminating Assignment**

The **Seeking Stability** chapter of the platform features an in-depth dialogue, moderated by site author and developer Michael Moran, between American Gideon Rose, Editor of *Foreign Affairs* magazine, and Russian Fyodor Lukyanov, Editor-in-Chief of *Russia in Global Affairs* magazine, who speak with one another about the roots and results of decades of tension and conflict, and their perspectives on what might need to happen to move toward a more stable future.

After students have explored all of the available content on the site, including the Seeking Stability chapter, ask them to prepare to hold a similar conversation in the class. Splitting students into three groups, have one write questions they believe to be helpful to determine the differing perspectives and the pathway to stability, and the other two groups will prepare to respond from the Russian or American perspectives.
Special Feature: How Will the 2020 Pandemic Impact U.S.-Russia Relations?

Since its emergence at the end of 2019, the COVID-19 coronavirus has spread from the central Chinese province Hubei to countries around the world. Highly contagious and often manifesting asymptptomatically, the virus was soon labeled a pandemic as its spread accelerated along global networks of travel, trade, and investment. As governments around the world respond to the public health crisis with their own state capacities and social priorities, they reveal the limitations of national tool kits.

• Some experts have long suggested that it would take an external shock, along the lines of an alien invasion, to prompt a paradigm shift in viewing the U.S.–Russia relationship exclusively through an adversarial prism. Is the coronavirus such a shock? If yes, identify the issues that could be advanced through a cooperative approach and the ways to start this process. If no, identify the obstacles to U.S.–Russia cooperation that cannot be overcome even during a global health crisis.

• The United States and Russia have different styles of government. Should these differences preclude cooperation on problems of mutual concern?

• How should the differences in styles of government be managed to promote cooperation on problems that cannot be solved if the two sides remain on opposite sides of the issues?

• How have Russian and American governments leveraged their economies to respond to the crisis? What are the assumptions and trade-offs being made by either country?

• The geopolitics map shows how American and Russian interests intersect around the world. How will the coronavirus alter the landscape, and what consequences will there be for U.S.–Russia strategic competition around the world?

• This series is rooted in an understanding of global engagement in which the key actors are competing states. Is this a useful frame for thinking about global peace and security? How could it be improved? How might the coronavirus demonstrate the importance of global solutions to global problems?

STUDY GUIDES, BY DISCIPLINE

International Relations, AP World History, U.S. History, and Human Geography

Seminar Question One: What are the significant turning points in the international relationship between the United States and Russia since early contact between the two countries beginning in the 18th century?

a. Timeline Chapter:
Explore the three periods of U.S.–Russia relations outlined in the Timeline and identify (1) the opportunities that expanded Russian influence on the international stage and opportunities that expanded U.S. influence on the international stage; and (2) conversely the factors that reduced Russian and U.S. spheres of influence on the international stage.
Seminar Question Two: UN Secretary-General António Guterres says in the introduction video to the Quest for Stability site, “The Cold War is back with a vengeance, but with a difference. The mechanisms and the safeguards to manage the reasons for escalation that existed in the past, no longer seem to be present.” Identify factors leading to the reasons for the breakdown of the mechanisms and safeguards for escalation.

a. Introduction Video
b. Timeline Chapter
   • After the Fall Section
c. Military and Cyber Chapter
   • Interview: Arms Control Interview: Igor Ivanov, former Russian Foreign Minister
d. Myths & Identity Chapter
   • Expectations Section: Igor Ivanov, former Russian Foreign Minister, talks about the hopes for Russian–U.S. partnership after the Cold War, and his perception of why they haven’t yet been realized.

Seminar Question Three: How do Russia and the United States currently perceive one another from a geopolitical perspective? Do you think Russian representatives would agree with American assessments and vice versa? Why or why not?

a. Geopolitics Chapter
   • Regions: China, Russia in U.S. Domestic Politics, Syria, and Ukraine.
b. Military and Cyber Chapter
   • Terrorism Interview: Angela Stent, former White House advisor and Georgetown professor, discusses how terrorism has informed the U.S. and Russia relationship since 9/11.
c. Energy and Economics Chapter
   • Daniel Yergin, Pulitzer Prize–winning author, talks about changing access to and export of oil, and how that has influenced U.S. and Russian roles in global conflicts and economies.
d. Myths & Identity Chapter
   • History Section: Fyodor Lukyanov, Editor-in-Chief of Russia in Global Affairs magazine, speaks of a divergence of national narratives.
   • Narratives Section: Russian historian Victoria Zhuravleva talks about the differing national “missions” of Russia and the U.S., and why they cause conflict.

Seminar Question Four: Explain the importance of Ukraine in the currently rising tensions between Russia and the U.S.

a. Timeline Chapter
   • The Soviet Period and After the Fall Sections
b. Geopolitics Chapter
   • Regions: Crimea, Ukraine, Former Soviet States, Russia Domestic Politics
   • Issues: Corruption
c. Military & Cyber Chapter
   • Military Balance & Tactics Section: Ukraine (Four Videos)
d. Energy & Economics Chapter
   • Macro and Energy Policy: Russian Energy – The Russian economy’s dependence on oil and gas revenues
e. Myths & Identity Chapter
   • Expectations Section: “The Malignant Seeds that Grew,” Columbia University professor Robert Legvold talks about the “malignant seeds” in U.S.–Russia relations that lingered after the Cold War ended.
History - Russia and the United States, AP World History, AP U.S. History

 Seminar Question One: Discuss how specific events precipitated shifts in U.S.–Russia relations. As you review the history, what patterns do you notice that emerge?

a. Timeline Chapter
   • Explore all three sections of the timeline.

b. Geopolitics Chapter
   • Regions: Former Soviet States, North Caucasus

c. Military & Cyber Chapter
   • Arms Control Section: Igor Ivanov

d. Energy & Economics Chapter
   • Russian Economic Issues Section

e. Myths & Identity Chapter
   • History Section: Six Videos
   • Narrative Section: The World War II Experience

 Seminar Question Two: Discuss the historical factors that made the end of the Cold War possible from Russian and American perspectives. How are they similar, and how do they differ from one another?

a. Timeline Chapter
   The Soviet Period

b. Geopolitics Chapter
   • Regions: Former Soviet States, North Caucasus
   • Global Issues and Organizations: Diplomacy

c. Energy & Economics Chapter
   Globalization: Russia’s Connection to the Global Economy

d. Myths and Identity Chapter
   • History Section: American Exceptionalism and Russian Destiny
   • Engagement Section: Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, “Gorbachev on the Challenge of Negotiations”
Seminar Question Three: Where would you situate the historical origin of the current escalation of tensions between Russia and the United States?

a. Timeline Chapter
   • After the Fall Section

b. Geopolitics Chapter
   • Regions: Crimea, Ukraine, Syria, Russian-Baltic Frictions

c. Energy & Economics Chapter
   • Macro and Energy Policy: Russian Energy
   • Trade Blocs and Sanctions: The Impact of Punitive Sanctions on Russia

d. Military & Cyber Chapter
   • Military Balance & Tactics: Strategy Section, Allen Lynch, University of Virginia
   • Nuclear Security: Arms Control Section, Anton Khlopkov, Advisory Board, Security Council of the Russian Federation
   • Cyber & Information Warfare: Elections Section, John Brennan, CIA

e. Myths & Identity Chapter
   • History Section: Dmitri Trenin, Director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, “American Exceptionalism and Russian Destiny”
   • Narratives Section: Russian historian Victoria Zhuravleva, “Two Countries, Two Visions.”

Political Science/Politics/Peace and Conflict Studies, AP World History, AP Human Geography

Seminar Question One: Discuss each nation’s view on the importance and purpose of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and its evolving role during and after the Cold War.

a. Timeline Chapter
   • Explore the Soviet Period and After the Fall sections to pinpoint the founding and purpose of NATO, the Warsaw Pact, and how they evolved during and after the Cold War.

b. Geopolitics Chapter
   • Regions: Former Soviet States, NATO and Eastern Europe, NATO Eastern Deployments, Ukraine, Russian-Baltic Frictions Organizations and Issues: United Nations, Madeleine Albright interview

c. Military & Cyber Chapter
   • Military Balance & Tactics: Strategy Section (Four Videos)

d. Energy & Economics Chapter
   • Spotlight Audio: Trade Blocs and Sanctions, Regional Bloc, Chris Miller, Director of the Eurasia Program, Foreign Policy Research Institute

e. Myths & Identity Chapter
   • Expectations Section: Stephen Sestanovich, former U.S. diplomat and Russia advisor, “Can NATO and Russia Just Get Along?”
   • Narratives Section: Angela Stent, Georgetown University, “Who Won the Cold War?”
   • Narratives Section: Nicholas Burns, former U.S. diplomat, “NATO is Not the Problem.”
Seminar Question Two: Analyze the areas where, in the past, the U.S. and Russia have found opportunities for collaboration. What happened to those opportunities, and what may be grounds for future partnerships or trust-building?

a. Timeline Chapter
   • Explore all three sections of the timeline to look for periods of history when the U.S. and Russia shared common cause

b. Geopolitics Chapter
   • Overview: Columbia University professor Robert Legvold
   • Regions: Afghanistan, Iran
   • Issues and Organizations: Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Space & Science

c. Military & Cyber Chapter
   • Military Balance & Tactics Section: Terrorism (Four Videos)
   • Nuclear Security Section: Arms Control (Six Videos)
   • Cyber & Information Warfare Section: Cyber (Eight Videos)

d. Myths & Identity Chapter
   • Engagement Section: William Ury, nuclear negotiator and Russia advisor, “The Role of Youth in U.S. Russia Relations.”
   • Engagement Section: Andrei Kortunov, Director-General of the Russian International Affairs Council, “Is Finding Common Cause Possible?”

Seminar Question Three: Social media, and other forms of journalism, continue to play an influential and consequential role in current U.S.–Russia relations. What are your recommendations for navigating the media moving forward?

a. Geopolitics Chapter
   • World Section: Russia in U.S. Domestic Politics

b. Military & Cyber Chapter
   • Cyber & Information Warfare Section:
     • Election Section: Four Videos
     • Propaganda Section: Russian American journalist and broadcaster Vladimir Pozner

 c. Myths & Identity Chapter
   • Engagement Section: Russian American journalist and broadcaster Vladimir Pozner, “The Space Bridge”
   • History Section: Russian American journalist and broadcaster Vladimir Pozner, “Two Countries, Each on a Mission”
Use the following prompts to encourage students in any discipline to explore all the resources the timeline has to offer.

**Note:** Discipline-specific instruction ideas are available in the Study Guide.

**Instruction Ideas:**

1) Split students into groups to explore each section of the timeline and report back to one another on key moments or concepts. Two groups may be assigned to different sections on the Soviet Period (before and after World War II) and the After the Fall chapter (before and after 9/11).

2) Students may choose a period of history to explore, such as colonial expansion, the Bolshevik revolution, World War II, Post-9/11, or others, and present in writing or to the class the events that occurred, describing both their immediate and long-term influences on U.S.–Russia relations. Encourage students to elaborate on the Russian and American perspectives as to which events are important and why they matter.

3) Students identify an item from current events, such as the Ukraine crisis, investigations into the 2016 election, or Russian influence in Turkey and/or Syria, and trace those events back through the timeline to present the historical context of current events to the class.
The rich content in this section reflects the nuanced ways that global interrelationships influence how U.S. and Russia relate to one another. It is navigable by country, region, global issues, and international organizations, and more.

Some subsections include multiple expert interviews that offer first-person accounts from key players, such as Madeleine Albright, former U.S. Secretary of State; William Perry, former U.S. Secretary of Defense; Igor Ivanov, former Russian Foreign Minister; Anton Khlopkov, member of the advisory board of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, and many more.

Encourage students in any discipline to dive deeply into the content using the following prompts.

**Note:** Discipline-specific instruction ideas are available in the Study Guide.

### Instruction Ideas:

1) Students can explore the whole of the Geopolitics section and create their own visual organizer highlighting the nations, regions, issues or organizations they perceive as representing critical aspects of conflict and/or opportunities for collaboration.

2) Using the collection of expert interviews (such as Ukraine, China, Turkey, Syria, the United Nations, or others), students can identify an area’s importance, outline different perspectives, and make geopolitical recommendations to keep the area or region sustained and to help it thrive.

3) Students can host a mock UN-style summit on the state of U.S.–Russia affairs with students representing different countries or interests on the map.
This chapter contains critical insight into the topics facing the nation currently, such as interference in U.S. elections, nuclear proliferation, and the global fight against terrorism, as well as insight into where technology is leading us.

Use the following prompts to encourage students in any discipline to access multiple resources from within this chapter.

**Note:** Discipline-specific instruction ideas are available in the Study Guide.

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**Instruction Ideas:**

1) Referencing interviews and topics from all three sections within the chapter, write a description of the major trends influencing the current conflicts and the balance of power between U.S. and Russia in the global context.

2) Students can write an opinion piece about which of the topics from this chapter they believe needs to be addressed most urgently. The piece should include specific examples of U.S. and Russian perspectives on the topic, and their recommendations for a pathway toward stability.

3) Students can choose an expert from one of the topics and use outside reference materials to find research that corroborates, elaborates, or promotes their perspectives.
Audio interviews and visual data such as charts and graphs describe economic influences in the U.S.–Russia relationship, with particular focus on oil and other sources of energy. The interactive graphs can be manipulated to achieve a fine-grained understanding of markets in the U.S., Russia, and around the world.

The following prompts will encourage students in any discipline to explore all of the data on the site.

**Note:** Discipline-specific instruction ideas are available in the Study Guide.

**Instruction Ideas:**

1) Use the audio interviews and charts in this chapter to summarize the major economic influences and pressures on Russia’s economy.

2) Review the information in the Energy & Economics chapter, and then reference the Geopolitics interactive map to identify countries, tensions, and relationships directly influenced by one or more of the economic factors described in this chapter.
The multiple interviews in this section shine a spotlight on the cultural and social issues and concerns of American and Russian people, with particular attention to how their differing worldviews influence their perspectives.

 Forty-one videos offer personal insights and in-depth looks into how social and cultural lenses influence international relations. Diverse and wide-ranging interviewees include former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, American economist Jeffrey Sachs, Russian late-night host Ivan Urgant, and U.S. astronaut Russell Schweickart, among many others.

Use the following prompts to encourage students in any discipline to listen deeply to multiple interviews in the Myths & Identity chapter.

**Note:** Discipline-specific instruction ideas are available in the Study Guide.

**Instruction Ideas:**

1) From each of the sections (engagement, history, etc.), choose one interview from a Russian point of view and one from an American point of view that you believe capture particularly important insights that each country would benefit from understanding about the other.

2) Find two or more interviews from both perspectives that reveal important commonalities between the Russian and American worldviews and explain what they share and why they are important.
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