



M.A. (DLB)0729 – Russo-Ukrainian War: Decoloniality, Reflexivity, Agency

JSIA – Spring 2026

Course Information

Course Duration: 15 weeks
Credit Hours: 60
Meetings: if you want
Location: FOB ground floor
Prerequisites: Basic courses in IR theory
Equivalent Courses: N/A
Exclusive Courses: N/A

Instructor Information

Instructor: Dr. Oleksandr Svitych
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1. Course Description

Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine continues to be a major disruption in global politics. It signals the end of Russia's dominance in the post-Soviet region and is contributing to the breakdown of the existing international order. While academic discussions about the invasion often fall into a realist versus liberal institutionalist framework, the roles of national identities, nationalism, and imperialism have been largely overlooked. Additionally, there has been insufficient focus on how Ukraine's own narratives of the war have been marginalized, both by Russia and by nations in the Global South. This proposed teaching module aims to address these gaps. It's based on the understanding, articulated by critical international relations scholar Robert Cox, that theory is always intertwined with power structures.

This module seeks to provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the Russo-Ukrainian war from a Ukrainian perspective, rather than a Western or Russian one. It moves beyond simplistic and inadequate explanations like "NATO expansion," "democratic decline," or "Putin's irrationality." Its primary objectives are to:

- address a gap in Indian public knowledge about the European Union and Ukraine;
- encourage critical thinking and reflection on the war through a decolonial lens;
- foster reflexivity, a sense of collective ethics, and shared responsibility by considering the experiences of individuals and communities affected by the conflict.

In summary, the module raises a critical issue of reflexivity in the study of wars in order to dismantle the epistemic hierarchies of knowledge production; improve the visibility of marginalized communities and subjectivities in academia and global politics; and challenge the dominance of Russian- and Western-centric perspectives on the region. In doing so, the module aims to promote the ethos of collaborative ethics and collective responsibility.

2. Course Objectives

For every course that I offer, I want you to become lifelong learners and critical thinkers. In line with Alfie Kohn (2006, p. 79–81), a key pre-requisite for that is to **stop thinking about grades**. More broadly, I want you to become ethical decision-makers and caring members of your communities.

Course Outcomes	Activities	Assessment
<i>Be a lifelong learner</i> Cultivate interest in learning itself. Unleash your natural curiosity. Remember that (excitement about) learning is more important than the product (grade).	Readings, class discussions	Internal and external
<i>Avoid what is easy and safe</i> Choose challenging tasks. Stretch yourself. Try something interesting and new.	Readings, class discussions, class presentations	Internal and external
<i>Become a sophisticated thinker</i> Think deeply and critically.	Readings, class discussions, group tasks	Internal and external

Come up with inventive ways of solving problems. Ask thoughtful questions. Think critically about what is said in the readings. Make connections between diverse ideas. Look at a topic from different angles.		
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3. Scheme of Evaluation and Grading

Internal breakup

Class participation 10%

Active participation is required for this class. You are expected to actively engage in class discussions.

Mid-term assessment 30%

It will take place at the 8th week. You will be required to write a book review on the topic of the Russo-Ukrainian war. The exact format will be confirmed as the course progresses.

Presentation 30%

This is a group exercise to present a reading from weeks 9-14 of the course. The task is three-fold: 1) briefly summarize the reading; 2) provide critical reflection; 3) show connections with the theoretical part of the course.

External breakup

Final exam 30%

Q&A paper for the duration of two hours. Detailed instructions will be announced later.

Grade Definition

Grading and Comments			
Letter Grade	Percentage of Marks	Grade Points	Comments
O	80 and above	8	Outstanding: Exceptional knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles and extraordinary critical and analytical ability.
A+	75 - 79	7.5	Excellent: Sound knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles and critical and analytical ability.
A	70 - 74	7	Very Good: Sound knowledge of the subject matter, excellent organizational capacity, ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles, critically analyse existing material and originality in thinking and presentation.
A-	65 -69	6	Good: Good understanding of the subject matter, ability to identify issues and provide balanced solutions to problems and good critical and analytical skills.

B+	60 - 64	5	Fair: Average understanding of the subject matter, limited ability to identify issues and provide solutions to problems and reasonable critical and analytical skills.
B	55 - 59	4	Acceptable: Adequate knowledge of the subject matter to go to the next level of the study and reasonable critical and analytical skills.
B-	50 - 54	3	Marginal: Limited knowledge of the subject matter and irrelevant use of materials, and poor critical and analytical skills.
P1	45 - 49	2	Pass 1: Pass with Basic understanding of the subject matter.
P2	40 - 44	1	Pass 2: Pass with Rudimentary understanding of the subject matter.
F	Below 40	0	Fail: Poor comprehension of the subject matter; poor critical and analytical skills and marginal use of the relevant materials. Will require repeating the course.

4. Academic Integrity

Plagiarism, including the use of ChatGPT, is strictly prohibited and will be penalized. Late submission of assignments will lead to a lower grade.

Use of phone in the class is prohibited unless there's an emergency. You must stay focused during the class. To understand why, please read the book *Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention* by Johann Hari.

The standard university attendance policy applies.

5. Keyword Syllabus

Introduction

The Russo-Ukrainian war

- Conflict, invasion, war
- Post-colonial perspective
- Syllabus review

Section I. Theory

History

- Ukraine and Russia: entangled history
- Soviet historiography
- Decoloniality

Neorealism

- Levels of analysis
- NATO expansion
- Gaps in the neo-realist framework

Liberal institutionalism

- Perpetual peace

- Democracy vs. authoritarianism
- Gaps in the liberal framework

Constructivism

- National identity
- Civilizational Nationalism
- Imperialism

Critical theory I

- Neo-Gramscian approaches
- Hegemony
- Guest lecture 1

Critical theory II

- Post-colonialism
- Decoloniality
- Guest lecture 2

Mid-term assignment

Section II. Issues

Just peace

Resistance

Decolonial populism

India's position

US position

Revision

Final exam

6. Course Materials

Readings

There will be readings assigned for each session / week. Please check UMS to access them in e-format.

Lecture notes

I will upload PPT slides after each lecture to UMS. Feel free to consult them to revise the course material.

Movies

We will also watch excerpts from movies to illustrate some of the main ideas in the course.

7. Session Plan

<i>Session</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Readings</i>	<i>Approach/Pedagogy</i>
Week 1	Introduction	No readings are required.	Radical and engaged
Week 2	History	Serhii Plokhyy, <i>The Russo-Ukrainian War</i> , pp. 15–44; Vladimir Purin, <i>On the Historical Unity of Russians</i>	Radical and engaged

Week 3	Neorealism	<i>and Ukrainians.</i> John J. Mearsheimer, <i>The Causes and Consequences of the Ukraine War.</i>	Radical and engaged
Week 4	Liberal institutionalism	Bann Seng Tan, <i>The revenge of 'democratic peace'.</i>	Radical and engaged
Week 5	Constructivism	Maria Popova & Oxana Shevel, <i>Russia and Ukraine. Entangled Histories, Diverging States.</i> Nicholas Morieson, <i>Civilizational Nationalism: Concept, Cases, and Global Implications.</i>	Radical and engaged
Week 6	Critical Theory I	Ruslan Zaporozhchenko, <i>The End of Russian Hegemony in the Post Soviet Space? War in Ukraine and Disintegration Processes in Eurasia.</i>	Radical and engaged
Week 7	Critical Theory II	Kseniya Oksamytna, <i>Imperialism, supremacy, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.</i>	Radical and engaged
Week 8	Mid-term exam	Book reviews are due.	
Week 9	Just peace	Michael Walzer, <i>Just and Unjust War</i> ; Nazar Syvak, <i>Applying Just War Theory to the Russo-Ukrainian War.</i>	Radical and engaged
Week 10	Resistance	Documentary “20 Days in Mariupol”; Andriy Zagorodnyuk, <i>Ukraine’s New Theory of Victory Should be Strategic Neutralization</i> ; Fabienne Bossuyt, Louise Amoris & Mykola Riabchuk, <i>The subaltern strikes back, or how Ukraine is claiming agency from Russia and the European Union.</i>	Radical and engaged
Week 11	Decolonial populism	Selbi Durdiyeva, ‘Not in Our Name:’ <i>Why Russia is Not a Decolonial Ally or the Dark Side of Civilizational Communism and Imperialism</i> ; Kira Huju, <i>How ‘decolonial Hindutva’ marries nativist politics with left-wing vocabulary.</i>	Radical and engaged
Week 12	India’s position	Mikhail Komin, <i>Late-stage Putinism: the war in Ukraine and Russia’s shifting ideology</i> ;	Radical and engaged

South Front, “India Summons Ukraine Ambassador Over Zelensky’s Shameful Remarks About Modi”;
Reuters, “India’s Modi tells Putin that ‘heart bleeds’ over deaths of children in war”.

Week 13	US position	Security Council Report, <i>In Hindsight: The US Pivot on Ukraine and Shifting Security Council Dynamics</i> ; Phillips O’Brien, <i>Trump Is Stringing Ukraine Along</i> ; Stefan Wolff, <i>Russian incursions into Nato airspace show Ukraine’s allied coalition needs to be ready as well as willing?</i>	Radical and engaged
Week 14	Revision	No readings are required.	Radical and engaged
Week 15	<i>Final exam</i>	This is the end. Congratulations!	

Useful maps and reports

Ukraine in maps: Tracking the war with Russia
<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0l0k4389g2o>

Map of the war in Ukraine by *DeepState*
<https://deepstatemap.live/>

Map of the war in Ukraine by the *ISW* (see also its *Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment* press releases)
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/36a7f6a6f5a9448496de641cf64bd375>

Ukraine Conflict Monitor by *ACLEd*
<https://acleddata.com/ukraine-conflict-monitor/>

UNHCR reports:
<https://ukraine.ohchr.org/en/reports>

Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine
<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n24/315/17/pdf/n2431517.pdf>

United West, divided from the rest: Global public opinion one year into Russia’s war on Ukraine
<https://ecfr.eu/publication/united-west-divided-from-the-rest-global-public-opinion-one-year-into-russias-war-on-ukraine/>