

Joan Kjaer: Hello. I'm Joan Kjaer and welcome to WorldCanvass from International Programs at the University of Iowa. This is part three of our program on the Russian Revolution 100 years On. Our guests in this segment will bring us up to the present as we examine Russia on the world stage. Next to me is Bill Reisinger, from the University of Iowa Department of Political Science. Thank you for being here, Bill.

Bill Reisinger: Very happy to.

Joan Kjaer: Next to him is Michaela Hoenicke Moore, from the University of Iowa Department of History. Thank you for joining us, Michaela.

Michaela H.M.: Gladly.

Joan Kjaer: Bill, I want to start with you. You're a political scientist, deep knowledge of Russia and the former Soviet Union. How do you assess the impact of the Russian Revolution, a century ago, on where we are today?

Bill Reisinger: Yeah. You know, there's sort of an irony, it seems to me, in that there are tremendous impacts on the history of the 20th century and into the 21st, that started in October of 1917. And, of course, as we heard in the first portion of the show, that began even much earlier than that. But 1917's impact ... One of the things I would mention would be the fact that party authoritarian regimes became a phenomenon in world affairs and a way for power to be managed in many countries around the world. You think about the communist regimes that came to power, modeled in many ways on the Soviet communist party and the way that they ran the Soviet Union. So, Cuba, China, North Korea, et cetera, et cetera. But not just communist ones. This kind of party-based form of authoritarianism is something that's available to be used by regimes that don't have communist goals. So it really did expand, I guess, the pallets of authoritarianism in our time. And that's something that I do think comes from the Soviet period.

There's also the impact that the living under communist rule had for the people in the societies where that happened for many decades. And we are seeing now that there's still carryover. There's still legacy from life under communism in these societies, that are even now post-communist, that still can be tracked and traced. Peoples' attitudes, the way that the societies function, the weak institutions, a greater prevalence for corruption, for example, and just a much weaker attachment to market-based capitalism and to democracy and the symbols of democracy and things like that. So you see these kind of carryovers even 100 years on.

Joan Kjaer: Why is it that so many of these communist societies, that you mentioned earlier, why is it that a controlled economy, as they were trying to do it, really didn't produce the results they would have hoped for?

Bill Reisinger: Isn't it sort of ironic? 100 years on, a whole bunch of the goals that the people making the revolution in 1917 had have been discredited or proven to be unworkable. And so, central planning as a way of running a national economy really doesn't have any proponents left, except, possibly North Korea and a few others, but in that particular form. The idea that there will be a move into communism at some point in the future ... communism being a utopian future where from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs. Right? This idea that you won't have to have power and politics and repression and other things. You can have a nice, orderly human society, but yet one in which there's abundance and all. Right? So, that image, has more or less been discredited. It's not a moving force in the world in the way it was 100 years ago.

In terms of why that is, I think a lot of it is the fact that the ideals of most of the people who made the revolution were betrayed by the way that power played out in the Soviet Union, certainly under Stalin. I think, in the first segment, we heard Michael talk about the ways in which it became a dictatorship of the party, rather than really being the kind of government that was hoped for. The local, more decentralized form of rule. And so, a lot of worse catastrophes of the 20th century ... The state-organized mass murders, on the scale of millions and millions and millions ... It wasn't communist regimes that began those in the century and they weren't the only ones who did it. But, on the kind of leaderboard of places where you had these terrible, terrible situations, the communist countries are right up at the top.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah. What is the sentiment now, in Russia, about their pathway out of the central control period and into, sort of, more capitalist market system within Russia? How do citizens feel about this now?

Bill Reisinger: I think they have ... There are many ways in which Russians, and this is similar to people in other post-communist countries, in which they have attitudes that are carryovers from the Soviet time. It's a co-mingling of, that carryover with the process of transition, as you suggested. As we heard in the second segment, the first decade, roughly, of that transition was brutally hard on the people in Russia. Massive hyperinflation, unemployment, disintegration of many kinds of social norms and institutions. Just a very difficult time, so they carry that with them.

On the other hand, what has sort of brought them today as the economy rebounded, was a sense of their country as being a continuation of the long-term Russian state project and a great deal of patriotism and pride. Of course, we see, that in the reaction that people have had to the annexation of Crimea and other actions by the Russian government in foreign policy, that support for the leadership goes up. There's a rally-around-the-flag effect that has made President Putin very popular. And that provides for the Russians a kind of cohesion on the whole. There's some 80% support for Putin's leadership. Even though the Russian population does not agree on everything, they are not happy with their system and their leaders, and they are happy to go out on the street and protest when things go bad. But the support for the very top

leadership has maintained itself despite that. And I think part of that is wanting to see themselves as part of the great Russian tradition that, in some ways, had to make it through the Soviet period.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah. Yeah, well, Michaela, let's go to you next and talk a little bit about U.S.-Soviet relations and the perceptions in the United States of Russia or the Soviet Union.

Michaela H.M.: Yes. That story also begins, of course, in 1917. Several months before the Bolshevik Revolution. The United States joins the Great War, joins the war in Europe. Thus, in some ways, I was just thinking about that. We have that scenario that the French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville had predicted in the 1830s, that in the future, there'll be two great powers. Russia from now on, in the form of the Soviet Union, and the United States. I think that the U.S. intervention in the Great War really does position it after the Spanish-American War, after the high point of imperialism to emerge as one of the great powers, and later, the super power in the 20th century. As Mike mentioned, also towards the end of the war the U.S. joins with other western powers in the military intervention in the civil war in Russia.

At the very end of the war, something else happens in the U.S. which foreshadows, I think, the then more important story of the U.S. and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Which is, we have our first Red Scare in this country. And just to clarify that and to remind everyone, there are connections between the Red Scare of the World War I and World War II, but there are also important distinctions. I would say the most important difference or distinction at the end of World War I, is that political leaders in this country, in the U.S. So, I'll just name the President, Woodrow Wilson, but also our famous Iowan, Herbert Hoover, who is very important throughout the 1920s as secretary of commerce, almost throughout the 1920s. And then, of course, eventually president. They are both radically and principled anti-communist and anti-Bolshevist. Neither one of them, nor anyone else, detects any national security threat, any danger that emanates from Russia/Soviet Union at that point.

So the response in 1917, '19, and thereafter, is not one of fear as we associate with the second Red Scare and with the Cold War, but is one of contempt. And, I think one should add, of hope. Hoover, for example, takes a very principled anti-interventionist stand. Both in that context, and later again in the late 1940s. He's really in favor of clearly not recognizing the Bolshevik regime, but pulling the U.S. troops out. And instead, sort of ignoring the Bolshevik regime, and sending aid and food. Which, of course, he does, after World War I, to other parts of Europe in order to win them over. Sort of, winning the hearts and minds. And let the Bolshevik regime, which cannot survive he thinks because that economy is not ... those economic ideas are not functional. The regime is too repressive, let it just collapse under its own weight.

One parallel that I would point to between the two Red Scares is ... And I only saw that actually and sort of freshening up my memory a little bit in preparation

for this evening, I found this amazing quote from 1919 from President Wilson. I think Americans in general, were in the context of that anti-communist fear, completely focused. As they would be decades later again on internal subversive enemies. And the problem with the first Red Scare, the same as later, is that people were unjustly targeted as communist subversives. People who were not Bolshevik. Although, those people were also there, but it was really against unions, it was against recent immigrants, it was against German Americans. You know, anyone else was associated, this linkage was made.

So that's the similarity, but what I found striking in this one quote that I saw by President Wilson, is that he publicly predicted that the agents of Bolshevism in this country would be the returning Negroes coming home from the war. And that, of course, is one of these scandalous features that we are all aware of, and the second Red Scare, in the 1940s. But many groups get targeted among others. People of different sexual orientation in the State Department, which leads to a terrible brain drain there. A kind of, almost, internal purge in the State Department. But also, the association of communism and Bolshevism after World War II with civil rights activism. When I saw that quote, I actually thought, one has to maybe interpret this on a deeper level that, Wilson, the Southern racist that he was. As well as later in the second Red Scare, people understood that this was a vulnerable point in the American democracy. You know, the lack of civil rights. And that they thought this vulnerable point, we're going to call them Bolshevik or communist first. Yeah.

Joan Kjaer:

Yeah, well you know, people of my age and younger are aware of this ... certainly, we think of Vietnam and the notion that communism in China would be spread all throughout Asia and elsewhere. This was a palpable reality for many of us who lived through the 60s, 70s, and thereafter. And, I mean, now nobody says the word communism. It's, kind of, not in anybody's current vocabulary. Other than, you know, you talk about North Korea, but that sort of seems to stand altogether on its own. It's a very interesting shift to me, to live through a period where that is really the main ... It seemed to me anyway, one of the very most prominent national security fears or, you know, our values and the form of our society being threatened by this thing out there that was going to overtake us if we weren't careful. And we don't speak in those terms anymore. Tell us how we moved through that.

Bill Reisinger:

Well, the Soviet Union and its allied countries stopped being able to produce new economic growth, new kinds of economic innovation. They had a period in the 50s...they were the first country to put a satellite in orbit, and then a human being in Earth's orbit, and there was a lot of reason to fear that in a competition, they were going to be very stiff opponents by the 1970s and 80s. It was clear that economically, they didn't have the wherewithal to keep up with the West, and it turns out that the system didn't have the wherewithal to deal with conflicts among ethnic groups and other kinds of cultural pluralism. That proved to be one of the most important factors in the end of the Soviet Union. And then, the fact is, that when you educate a population and provide upward mobility and things, people want to have a greater political voice. And that also

creates pressure from below, that the communist system in the Soviet Union was very poor at managing.

And so I think, you look at history now ... in many ways, what had been a feared Soviet model is no longer talked about, no longer treated seriously, et cetera. But there is a sense in which many in the West went too far and declared the end of history and that all Western ideas had won the ideological battle and there was going to be no more contending in these things. And that doesn't look so good 25 years on as it did in the late 80s and early 90s. So, you don't want to go too far and say, "The West totally won," or something. But, it was clear that the bulk of the problem was coming from the systems themselves not working very well.

Michaela H.M.:

I think I would, maybe, add to that, that even though we may not be using that term quite so much, and it's no longer that recognizable enemy. The consequences of the Cold War, I think, shaped this country deeply in different ways. Both, in terms of its geopolitical position. It's really during the Cold War that our foreign policy becomes a kind of militarized globalism and we are undoubtedly an empire, in that regard and in that context.

I would also say that the Cold War is obviously a global phenomenon, and in addition to who wins the Cold War in the end, I think there are people who benefit from that global Cold War, and there are people who suffer proportionately much more. And I would say that Europe, for example, especially Western Europe, including my home country where I was born, West Germany, should be counted among the beneficiaries. Also, of American Cold War foreign policy. It sort of builds up an umbrella under which the Europeans, the Western Europeans in general, can move forward with their project of European unification and so on. Whereas, the Cold War turns hot in other places around the world and on other continents. In Asia, in particular, but also in Africa, with wars of proxy in these other places. And it's those societies, I think, that are carrying the burden.

I would add on the part of the United States, that the U.S. also pays in this war as the Soviet Union does in terms of blood and treasure. But also, I think both sides actually, different as they are, democracy and dictatorship, pay in terms of their domestic culture. Political culture. So, if I just could briefly come back to that, to the beginning, the origins of the Cold War. Which, I think, are more properly located in that period and that transformative, and anxious, and insecure period between the end of World War II and maybe 1950, when the Cold War turns hot with Korea.

I think if we look at the discourse of this country, but also at the political elites, at foreign policy makers, there are very different kinds of anti-communisms in this country that you can differentiate. There is Hoover, I already mentioned him. A kind of very principled anti-Bolshevist, anti-communist, but non-interventionist that survives in the Republican Party into the post World War II period, with the sort of Robert Taft wing. We are confronting them, but not

militarily. What really comes to the foreign to power with Truman, and then is carried on with Eisenhower, is a more militant and interventionist anti-communism. And then, a third category I think that is important, is people who were interested in anti-communism almost as solely a domestic ideology, with which to push back against certain groups within this country.

Bill Reisinger: Yeah, I guess I would say that I really think that's right. And I guess, as I look forward in time a hundred years from now, if the United States has any chance to manage the power transition from China, India, maybe other countries over the next century, it seems to me it's going to be because there is an international order that's based on legal principles and international organization and clear rules of the road. And every time the United States backs a dictator against its democratic principles, every time the United States militarizes conflicts, it's undercutting the principles that could be helpful in that process. So there are real costs to be paid, and that have been paid prior to this, for sure.

Joan Kjaer: So, here we are, at a time I remember a few years ago when Mitt Romney was in one of the debates, and he remarked that perhaps our greatest concern on the international stage was Russia, and he was kind of laughed out of the room. I remember the commentary after that remark. And then, of course, in this most recent election, we have a candidate who seems to have all kinds of interest in befriending Russia or whatever. We can all take that sentence wherever we want to take it. But, what does Russia want now? You have better insight into these things than most of us do. What do you think ... What is this game?

Bill Reisinger: Well, Russia wants to be a great power. So, it believes it is and must be seen as, and must be treated as a great power just on the face of things. Russia believes that its size, and its population, and its traditions, and other things make it one of the world's great powers. Which means, that they believe they ought to have a particular power, and particular influence in their neighborhood. In the area, particularly the former Soviet Union and the former Soviet bloc. They want to have enough power to be able to project selectively into other regions of the world, as they're doing now with Syria. Primarily, because that is a way to be taken seriously, a somebody who needs to be consulted with on the world's stage. And they would like to ... Part of that image of themselves, they would like to reduce the coherence and effectiveness of democratic ideals and the language that is used by the western powers in the world order.

So I think, they're not the only leadership at present of major countries that are trying to, I think, create an impression that so called democracy, and other things, is not what it's cracked up to be. But that it is part of the project, I think.

Joan Kjaer: And what do you think?

Michaela H.M.: So, I have two thoughts about this. One is that, I think the story of Putin and Putin's Russia begins in 1989, 1990. Which was such a particularly happy moment, because it marks the end of the Cold War, but also for my home

country, it's German unification. And I was very interested in reading recently about scholars pouring over the, until recently, secret documents of those highest ranking negotiations between Bush 41 cabinet. Especially, the president himself as well as Secretary of State Baker, and Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, and of course Helmut Kohl, the German chancellor then. And also, these same scholars talking to the participants who would still be around.

And Bill can help me out with this, but the story that emerges is, these were maybe among the most important diplomatic international relations, negotiations in the 20th century. And the Americans had, I mean, all sides had ... But the Americans had a list of maximum, best possible outcome for us. And the result of the negotiations is, a promise that Gorbachev will allow Germany to reunify. Which was huge. And also, be a member, remain a member or become unified. Germany, would become a member of NATO. And he would do that, the Soviet Union, would do that in exchange for financial aid from the West German government. Which, was a small ... those millions were a small price to pay for this. And this outcome of the negotiations, pretty much is the very top of what the Americans were expecting.

Later in his memoirs, Secretary of State Baker, reflects on this. I think in the typical manner of a seasoned diplomat and says, "The only thing we have to worry about, is that sometimes in these extravagant cases of diplomatic success, you really have the seeds of future problems." And another commentator on that same scene would be Putin, who was present in '89, in East Germany as a young KGB officer and who about 10 years later in the late 1990s comments on that and talks about how devastated and demoralized he was. Let us say, as a Russian patriot. And so the revisionist urge, I think, starts at that very moment, because it's not clear where NATO expansion would stop. So, if a united Germany can be part of NATO, there is no promise that the Western powers give where this is going to stop. Putin says, at that moment, "It's clear that Russia has been pushed out of Europe and has been pushed back [inaudible 00:25:00]. And it will not be there silently."

Joan Kjaer:

Wow. Well, thank you so much, Michaela Hoenicke Moore. Really, really so interesting. And Bill Reisinger, very grateful you would be here and share your insights. And to everybody listening, all of you here in the room with us, thank you for coming. I hope you've enjoyed the evening as much as I have. If you'd like to hear this program or any other WorldCanvass programs, they're all available on iTunes, the Public Radio Exchange, and the International Programs website, which is [international.uiowa.edu](http://international.uiowa.edu).

And our next program is coming up soon. It's on December 7th, here in this room at 5:30. Our guests are part of the Art & the Afterlife project at the University of Iowa Museum of Art. And we'll have faculty from the School of Art and Art History as well on that program. For all of us, and for International Programs, thank you very much and good night.