Experts usually view Russia as an enemy of innovation if it connotes the expansion of economic and political freedoms that enable society to devise new, more effective methods of political governance and economic development. Russia’s rulers -- under the tsars, the commissars, and post-Soviet elites -- have often resisted innovations that characterize modernity if they threatened centralized, non-democratic power. This context helps explain not only Russia’s invasion of Ukraine -- as Kyiv increasingly moved toward the liberal, democratic West -- but also the poor battlefield performance of the Russian Army which is hobbled by corruption and over-centralization.

By contrast, Ukraine has demonstrated the ability to innovate on the battlefield and incorporate Western weapons into its armed forces. How might military innovation change on both sides as the war continues? How can the United States help Ukraine innovate in building effective and legitimate economic and democratic institutions, now and after the war ends? As for Russia, how can the United States contain Russia’s regional and global ambitions? What sort of policy innovations might Washington develop for these vital tasks?

**Proposed Topics and Questions for Discussion** (The readings below have links but you may encounter a pay wall. If so, access the readings through your institution’s library):

**The War in Ukraine: Whither US Policy?**

Given the resilience of Ukraine in resisting the Russian invasion -- due in large part to its innovations on the battlefield -- what should US policy be in the future? Should US advocate that Ukraine liberate all of the territory seized by Russia, even if it requires a long war of attrition? Or should the United States support a less-than-satisfactory settlement that may involve a Korea-style agreement that leaves some Ukrainian territory indefinitely under Russian occupation?

**Readings:**


**Should the US Support the Expansion of NATO to Ukraine? If so, when?**

Should NATO offer Ukraine membership immediately after the war ends, either in outright victory for Ukraine or a negotiated peace? What are the costs and benefits of this path? Recall that Vladimir Putin and most Russian elites consider the incorporation of Ukraine into NATO to be the reddest of red lines. Should the West offer Ukraine non-NATO security guarantees instead? What would such innovations look like?

**Readings:**


SCUSA 74 Roundtable Topic: Containing Russia and Defending Ukraine

After the War: Relations with Ukraine and Russia

To what extent, and with what innovative policies, should the United States support the reconstruction of Ukraine? How might US bi-partisan support for Ukraine, which remains relatively strong, be sustained after the guns go silent? How should the United States engage Russia in a post-conflict setting? Should the US address any of Putin’s grievances concerning the US-led international system? Recall that at least some of these grievances are shared by the so-called Global South, including China.

Readings:


Assessing the Prospects for Democracy in Ukraine and Authoritarianism in Russia

What are the prospects for the development of stable democracy in Ukraine and its membership in the European Union, a club of mostly prosperous democracies? What can the US and the EU realistically do to support these outcomes, particularly given Ukraine’s history of economic underdevelopment, divisive and often corrupt politics, regional divisions, and now the devastation of war? As for Russia, how will the war affect political stability at home and Russia’s reputation as a great power abroad? What if Russia’s regime or possibly its state collapses as a result of possible defeat in Ukraine?

Readings:


Managing Competition and Conflict with China

What role will China play in the conflict over Ukraine? Will it be a spoiler or peace-maker? So far, the evidence suggests that China will stop short of full support for Russia in its aggression, but will refuse to abandon its key partner in the struggle for global influence against the United States. Will Chinese aid to Russia be sufficient for the Kremlin to continue the war with an expectation of a favorable outcome? What should the United States and the West do to minimize China’s cooperation with Russia?
SCUSA 74 Roundtable Topic: Containing Russia and Defending Ukraine

Readings:

The Nuclear Threat

How can the United States reduce the risk of a nuclear escalation in the Ukraine-Russian War? If Russia uses nuclear weapons in the war, how should the United States respond? Should the United States adopt an innovative strategy and use its considerable cyber capability and other conventional assets against Russian forces in Ukraine or in the Russian homeland as a form of retaliation? What other political, military, and diplomatic tools might Washington employ?

Readings:


*The readings have links but you may encounter a pay wall. If so, access the readings through your institution’s library.*