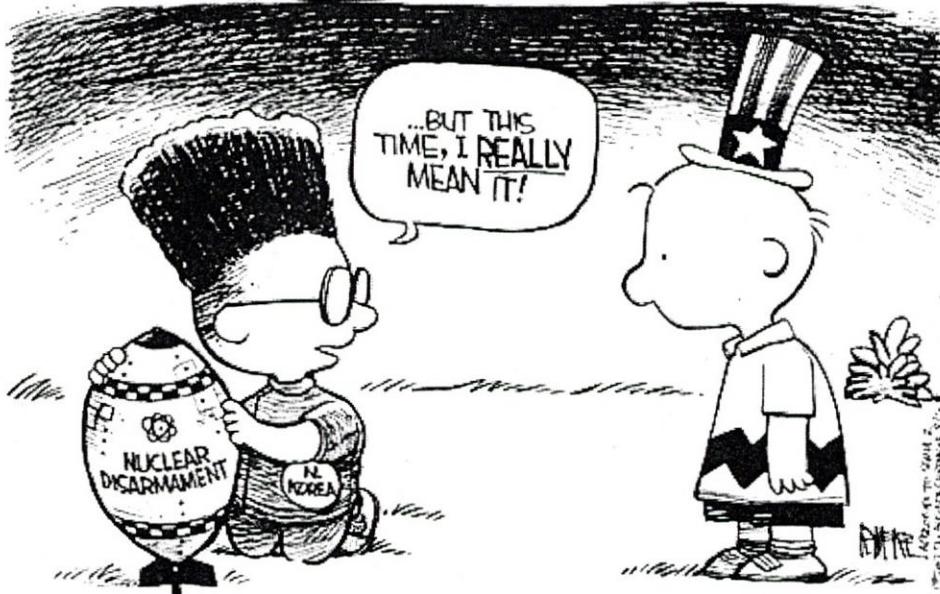


SAASS 632

FOUNDATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

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## SAASS 632: Foundations of International Politics

**Course description and objectives:** According to the prominent international relations scholar John Mearsheimer, “All students and practitioners of international politics rely on theories to comprehend their surroundings. Some are aware of it and some are not, but there is no escaping the fact that we could not make sense of the complex world around us without simplifying theories.” The same can be said of the military strategist. Accordingly, this course introduces you to theories of international politics used to assess strategic problems in the international arena. The rationale for this course stems from the conviction that one cannot do strategy without a working knowledge of international politics and all that is encompassed within the field that explores relationships between nation-states.

The course is divided into three blocks. The first provides an overview of international relations/politics as it has developed in the modern era. From this development, we consider the most dominant theories/perspectives in the field to learn about their assumptions, primary areas of concern and what they offer with respect to explaining the political environment we observe around us. The second block focuses in on the roles and limits of military coercion within international politics. It is the use of coercion and military force that most of the theories in the first block grapple with, particularly in terms of how states straddle the line between conflict and cooperation. As a result, we will spend time pondering some of the challenges states face addressing one of their most important tasks, the provision of security for their citizens. In the final block we turn toward trying to understand the roles of economic and geographic factors in international affairs. As we will see at the outset, the nature of economic development and where states are located in the world matter when it comes to decision making in the areas of security and strategy.

**Expectations and alibis:** If theories of international politics are unfamiliar to you, be forewarned: the literature on this subject can be intimidating. Remember, however, we are on a journey. It is a journey you will find both rewarding *and* challenging. This course is a bit different from what you’ve been doing thus far, both in approach and substance. Be sure to give yourself time to adjust if this is a new area of study.

That said, while we only skim the surface of what a full-fledged IR graduate seminar would cover, in terms of time and design, this course is geared toward making you a better strategist. To this end, we focus on theory and assessment, particularly in those areas that are most important for your development as a strategist. Recall, a theory is a picture—mentally formed—of a bounded realm or domain of activity. Theories explain things. They do so by isolating one realm of activity from another. Though not divorced from the real world of experiment and observation, theories are only indirectly connected to it. Thus theories are never said to be ‘true.’ We judge theories in terms of their usefulness. What we want to know then is what does a theory seek to explain and how useful is that explanation?

In terms of assessment, a crude but effective way to assess theories of international politics is to test them against the world around you. At present, the US, China, North Korea, Russia, Iran, Syria, and the European Union are in the news. How do strategists sort through the noise to get at the heart of explaining the various issues that are international politics? Theories help—they

allow one to focus on a small number of big and important things with strategic significance. They are only as helpful though as the level of diligence you provide in assessing a problem holistically, with theory serving as a useful guide of things to focus upon.

To help you develop this analytic skill, we will examine world events in class regularly. Keep up with current events by reading *The New York Times*; it is the paper of record. *The Wall Street Journal* is also excellent as are other sources such as *The Economist*, *National Review*, *The New Republic* or *Foreign Affairs*, to name but a few. Journals such as *International Security*, *International Organization*, or *International Studies Quarterly* represent the latest research in the field. Lastly, get in the habit of visiting the websites of institutions and organizations like the UN, NATO, WTO, ASEAN, EU, UNASUR, Amnesty International, and the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists.

As you read the selections for this course, it will become quite clear to you that the range of international politics in terms of perspective and prescription is great. While you undoubtedly will gravitate more toward some positions than others, I encourage you to keep an open mind and to identify and acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of all the material. This demands mental stamina and a lot of hard work on your part. The reward is a foundation from which to evaluate future research that will enhance your development as a strategist.

**Course Assignment:** You will be required to write an **original ten-page paper** that makes a clear argument **addressing a topic to be provided NLT Tuesday, 19 Oct.** The paper will be written in Times New Roman font, size 12, with one inch margins on all sides. Endnotes are allowed and do not count against the page limit, but they should consist primarily of references and not include substantial explanatory text. **The paper is due to your professor by 1600L on Friday, 2 Nov.**

**Grading:** Your final grade will be based on seminar participation (40%) and the written assignment (60%). If you are in doubt as to how you measure up in seminar participation, speak with your professor.

**Readings:** The following is the list of books used for the course. Two articles are assigned on select days to round out the reading list. The articles are listed in full citation form on the day they are assigned and can be located on the SAASS O: drive or downloaded from the MSFRIC databases.

Blackwill, Robert D. and Jennifer M. Harris. 2016. *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Buzan, Barry and George Lawson. 2015. *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Byman, Daniel and Matthew Waxman. 2002. *The Dynamics of Coercion. American Foreign Policy and the Limits of Military Might*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Copeland, Dale C. 2015. *Economic Interdependence and War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Drezner, Daniel. W. 2015. *Theories of International Politics and Zombies. Revived Edition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Finnemore, Martha. 2003. *The Purpose of Intervention. Changing Beliefs about the Use of Force*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Gilpin, Robert. 1981. *War and Change in World Politics*. New York: Cambridge.

Ikenberry, G. John. 2011. *Liberal Leviathan. The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Keohane, Robert O. 2005. *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kroenig, Matthew. 2018. *The Logic of American Nuclear Strategy: Why Strategic Superiority Still Matters*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Marshall, Tim. 2016. *Prisoners of Geography. Ten Maps that Explain Everything about the World*. New York: Scribner.

Mearsheimer, John J. 2001. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: WW Norton.

Narang, Vipin. 2014. *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era. Regional Powers and International Conflict*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Schelling, Thomas. 1966. *Arms and Influence*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Waltz, Kenneth. 2001. *Man, the State and War. A Theoretical Analysis*. New York: Columbia University Press.

The remainder of the syllabus includes the class schedule including topics and readings, along with a short description of them. Come prepared to engage and to be enlightened (hopefully). On behalf of my fellow instructors, we look forward to 15 fun-filled days of international politics.

Welcome to 632!

## **Class Schedule – Topics and Readings**

### **BLOCK 1: Modern International Relations and IR Theory**

#### **9 Oct – The Development of Modern International Relations**

##### **Readings (1):**

Buzan and Lawson, *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations*

Buzan and Lawson provide a nice introduction to the study of international relations. Their main argument focuses on the concept of the ‘long nineteenth century’ and its impact on international relations today. In reading this, there are several things to consider that merit discussion. First, how compelling is their argument? What evidence and logic do they provide and how does this evidence comport with your own understanding of international relations? In what ways is the 19<sup>th</sup> century a useful historical period to consider in the 21<sup>st</sup>? In what ways is it not? Additionally, in reading this book, one should get a sense for some of the larger themes in international politics. What are the main political units in international politics? How have the roles of these units changed? How has power transformed in the international system? What impacts have globalization and modernization wielded on the international stage? Why is the notion of core and periphery relations important? What about sovereignty? How has it changed over time? Finally, how persistent are some of the 19<sup>th</sup> century ideologies in the 21<sup>st</sup> and how are they manifest today?

#### **11 Oct – Introduction to IR Theory**

##### **Readings (1):**

Drezner, *Theories of International Politics and Zombies*

While Buzan and Lawson provide a good historical assessment of the development and modernization of international relations, the study of IR takes place within the context of theory. The discussion of *The Global Transformation*, makes apparent the role theory plays in how one makes sense of the relationships between political actors. In this book Drezner provides a simple and perhaps a little silly introduction to the various ways political scientists explain the world around them. For those that have some background in international politics, this reading will serve as a good review. For those that have no background in this field, Drezner and his zombie brethren should make the transition to international politics somewhat painless and at the very least enjoyable. As you read through the book, consider the differences between the theoretical perspectives. What does each seek to explain? What are the most salient explanatory variables in each perspective? What limits does each theory have? Are any better than the others? Why or why not? Also, take note of the different levels of analysis the theoretical perspectives focus upon. How and why might that matter? Which theories seem most applicable to studying security, conflict and strategy? Why? While zombies might not be your thing, think about the issue as a metaphor for potential widespread challenges that could really test the ability to maintain international order. Aside from being funny and different, Drezner’s book does help summarize the IR theories and should facilitate your grasp of what each theory provides in terms of its basic argument and how these theories relate to policymaking.

## **12 Oct – International Politics as a Systemic Problem: The Origins of Neorealism**

### **Readings (1):**

Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (Intro, Chapters 1, 2, 4, 6-8)

Waltz's work represents the beginning of the neo-realist tradition in IR. Dissatisfied with the nature of explanations regarding the origins of war, Waltz analyzes three images or levels of analysis with respect to understanding conflict between states. This work lays the foundation for what he develops as a theory of international politics, known to us today as defensive realism. While this book does not develop the theory itself (see *Theory of International Politics*), it allows the reader to consider the various ways in which one might answer the question: From where do the major causes of war originate? Building on the writings of political philosophers, Waltz begins an analysis that offers to the reader the importance of the international system as a major cause of conflict, separate from other levels such as the individual (e.g. nature of man) and the state (e.g. domestic causes). In considering this piece, think about your own thoughts on what drives conflict between states. How does this perception fit with what Waltz offers? Is the idea of systemic factors driving the relations between states plausible? Do policymakers act as if this is the case?

## **15 Oct – Realist Thought: Offensive Realism**

### **Readings (1):**

John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*

In this book, Mearsheimer presents the theory of 'Offensive Realism.' One of his central claims is that great powers consistently look for opportunities to gain power at another's expense. In other words, great powers strive for more power; they do not 'naturally' balance against it. This is in contrast to what Waltz derived from his own theory of international politics. The result is a world characterized by fear, mistrust, instability, and aggression. Do Mearsheimer's predictions necessarily flow from his underlying assumptions? Must concerns over survival mandate aggressive state behavior? What strategies stem from the tenets of Offensive Realism? What world events over the past five years either support or undermine Mearsheimer's logic?

## **16 Oct – Hegemonic Stability Theory**

### **Readings (1):**

Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Intro, Chapters 1-6)

Gilpin makes three main claims in this book: strong states seek hegemony, wars result from certainty, and peaceful change is rare. Nonetheless, there is utility in hegemony as it provides an elegant answer to the 'order problem'. Must international order be dependent upon a hegemon? Is the United States a declining hegemon? If so, what are the implications for international politics? What strategies stem from hegemonic stability theory? How do the arguments here contrast with Mearsheimer's expectations?

## **18 Oct - Cooperation through Institutions**

### **Readings (1):**

Keohane, *After Hegemony*

What if there is no hegemon? Should one assume that states cannot cooperate without a powerful state enforcer? Keohane offers an explanation of cooperation through the use of institutions. While realism suggests cooperation is transient and power politics creates conditions that make other states untrustworthy, Keohane argues that institutions are mechanisms that can mitigate anarchical conditions. As a result, institutions are key actors in the international system and will remain so in the absence of a hegemon. Today, there is little doubt about the power of institutions in the international system. Which institutions matter and why, however, remain contentious questions. Keohane focuses on power and interest in driving cooperation. Might there be other factors? Are institutions merely reflective of state power and interest or do they have independent effects on state interactions in ways similar to how realists discuss international structure? *After Hegemony* begins this discussion and shapes much of how we think about institutions today, liberal or otherwise.

## **19 Oct – Liberal thought and Liberal theory: Liberal International Order**

### **Readings (1):**

G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*

We continue our discussion of institutions but in a very specific context. Neo-liberal institutionalism is the contemporary expression of liberal thought and builds upon Keohane's own work on regimes. Ikenberry focuses on economic interactions, international institutions and the relationships among the great powers. That each set of factors play a role in international politics is hard to deny, but do they play 'the' causal role? What is the significance and role of institutions in US grand strategy, for example? Is the American built and led order durable? What are the primary risks and challenges to this order and its associated institutions? Can other institutions replace the 'liberal' ones established by the US and its allies? How might Keohane argue in response to Ikenberry's argument? What would Gilpin have to say here regarding the future of the international system?

## **22 Oct - Constructivist thought and Constructivist theory: Anarchy, Norms and Ideas**

### **Readings (2):**

Wendt, Alexander. 1992. "Anarchy is what States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics." *International Organization* 46(2): 391-425.

Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention*

The application of social constructivism to the study of international politics presents a challenge to both realism and liberalism. Wendt, one of the original architects of the movement, emphasizes the importance of ideas over material factors and concludes there is no single logic of international anarchy. Instead, anarchy is what states make of it. What can constructivism help explain better than realism and liberalism? Does the privileging of ideas allow constructivists more explanatory space than realists or liberals? What strategies stem from a constructivist perspective?

In order to address constructivist thought more fully, we focus our attention on Wendt's 1992 article (in lieu of reading his lengthier but not necessarily better book) in addition to looking at the application of constructivism in the area of intervention. Finnemore examines changing ideas about the use of force, arguing that over time, new types of military intervention become more useful and effective "because states' definitions of utility have changed, not in material ways but in social and normative dimensions." What causes these social and normative dimensions regarding the use of military force to change? Finnemore published this book in 2003. Have our beliefs about the use of force changed since then? What is the role of the military as an agent in this process of change? It also bears mentioning that Buzan and Little discuss these ideas in *The Global Transformation*. How does their conversation on intervention (as it relates to sovereignty) compare with Finnemore's own understanding of how this concept has changed?

## **BLOCK 2: Military Deterrence and Coercion in International Politics**

### **23 Oct - Logic of Military Coercion**

#### **Readings (2):**

Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (Chapters 1-4)

Talmadge, Caitlin. 2017. "Would China Go Nuclear? Assessing the Risk of Chinese Nuclear Escalation in a Conventional War with the United States." *International Security* 41(4): 50-92.

Today's readings begin a block focused more narrowly on the logic and utility of military coercion within the international domain, starting with the iconic Thomas Schelling. Schelling's work leads us to consider the role of bargaining and the impact of the threat of violence on bargaining. Taken together, some might label this "the diplomacy of violence." Can such threats lead to peace and security in the international system? What sorts of mechanisms and/or factors are required to make this work? What is the difference between coercion and deterrence? What can we learn from past attempts at military coercion? Do nuclear weapons matter? How do they change the deterrence calculus?

To this end, Talmadge's work moves us away from abstract theory to a practical concern regarding the ability of the US to influence China through the use or threat of violence. Specifically, she examines the conditions under which China might engage in nuclear escalation with the US in a conventional war. How do her arguments about China's escalatory strategy comport with Schelling's discussion of coercion and compellence? What lessons might we take away from this study in considering military options against another nuclear state in the future? Is the China problem similar to the USSR threat to which Schelling speaks? How so? Why not?

### **25 Oct – The Use and Limits of Coercion**

#### **Readings (1):**

Byman and Waxman, *The Dynamics of Coercion*

Byman and Waxman offer a comprehensive study of the use of force in US foreign policy. How does coercion work? What makes coercion effective? What factors limit the ability of the US to engage in coercion? How should one consider the different types of instruments of coercion in terms of when they are best utilized? In reading this, you should come away with a sense of how

difficult coercion is for even a powerful state like the US. Consider the historical examples used and how they might have implications for some of our potential targets of coercion today.

### **26 Oct – Deterrence and US Nuclear Strategy Revisited**

#### **Readings (1):**

Kroenig, *The Logic of American Nuclear Strategy*

Why do we need such a robust nuclear force posture? Kroenig argues that size indeed does matter, as it strengthens the US's ability to credibly deter in addition to providing bargaining leverage in conflict. These benefits suggest that maintaining an arsenal larger than those of its rivals is a good, long term nuclear strategy. This argument contrasts others that suggest merely having a survivable second strike is sufficient. Consider Kroenig's case carefully. Be sure to move beyond simply the US calculus. How might such a strategy work with a great power like China that pursues an opposite approach (i.e. minimum deterrence)? What implications, if any, might this strategy have on related issues such as non-proliferation and asymmetric warfare?

### **29 Oct – Nuclear strategy in states with small arsenals**

#### **Readings (1):**

Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*, (Chapters 1-5, 7, 9-11)

We continue with nukes but move beyond deterrence and US strategy exclusively to consider how states with small nuclear arsenals develop strategies and why they choose the ones they do. Narang presents an explanation of these choices through what he labels 'Posture Optimization Theory'. What does this theory explain actually? What postures are available? What differences exist between the various states he considers in his discussion as they relate to nuclear strategy? How does the development of nuclear arsenals among smaller states affect deterrence calculations? How does Narang test his argument? How do regional dynamics affect postures? Are there any takeaways regarding the impact of nuclear postures on non-proliferation in the international system? Given the US approach to nuclear weapons, should policymakers expect small states to behave differently than what Narang argues? In which cases? Why?

## **BLOCK 3: Economic and Geographic Factors in International Politics**

### **30 Oct – Economic Interdependence**

#### **Readings (1):**

Copeland, *Economic Interdependence and War*, (Intro, Chapters 1-4, 6, 9)

Most recently, globalization has had powerful influences on state decision making. With states concerned over unequal distributions of benefits, some have asked whether or not states' foreign economic policies are pushing toward greater competition and potential conflict. A considerable volume of IR scholarship examines the relationship between economics and conflict, but to date the results have been mixed. Copeland's work provides a new take on the issue of economic interdependence and its influence on conflict. He points to expectations as driving the behaviors of actors in ways that potentially lead to peaceful arrangements or international crises. Such work is important to consider given that thoughts of globalization as positive, benign or simply affecting the international economy seem too simplistic. Does economic integration reduce the

likelihood of military conflict? What are the implications of current trends in globalization for international politics? Does history effectively inform us about the future we are likely to observe as it relates to economic interdependence and conflict?

## **1 Nov – Economic Statecraft and Geoeconomics**

### **Readings (1):**

Robert D. Blackwill and Jennifer M. Harris, *War by Other Means*

Blackwill and Harris identify an often overlooked aspect of coercive influence. The concept of 'geoeconomics' and statecraft are both making a considerable impact on how states view the range of power and capabilities at their disposal, particularly ones that are less likely to lead to the use of violence. What is geoeconomics? What is statecraft? The authors note the difficulty facing the US in employing economic means to achieve geopolitical ends, despite the fact that other states like Russia and China appear to be very adept at doing so. How does this inability to engage in geoeconomics as effectively as others impact US power vis-à-vis these other actors? Are Blackwill and Harris' claims too strong regarding the power of economic statecraft? Tying this discussion to the previous discussions of coercion, does the ability to engage in geoeconomics still rely on the ability to employ force? How might the US better utilize its economic power to coerce or influence others more than it has historically? Are there any reasons such efforts might be limited? If so, what are they?

## **2 Nov – Geopolitics**

### **Readings (1):**

Marshall, *Prisoners of Geography*

We end the course with Marshall's discussion of the role of geography in some of the more important arenas of international affairs. While this is not a formal introduction to the field of geopolitics, Marshall's work allows us to remember that territory still matters in international politics for a range of reasons. Certainly one should walk away from this reading thinking that context is important. Does geography, however, have a more central feature in strategic thinking than we tend to give it credit for? How should a strategist consider geographic factors in assessing an adversary? How much has technology made considerations of geography less relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Evaluate Marshall's argument with Mearsheimer's. What ties exist between neorealism and geopolitics?

### **Closing Remarks**

International politics is complicated and messy. The use of theory should be a valuable tool for developing strategy, but it is important to recognize that simplicity is for the foolhardy. While theory provides a way of reducing complexity, no one theory can provide answers for a strategist. Rather, theories should help to develop effectively the framing of problem sets in such a way as to illuminate multiple perspectives on any international issue. In turn, such framing increases the likelihood of better decisions and outcomes. For a strategist, while the study of international politics is difficult to be sure, it is well worth the effort.

