GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

GOVT 006 — INTRODUCTION TO INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Dr. Paul Christopher Manuel
T, Thurs, 2:00–3:15 p.m.
Office: ICC 676A
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 2–4 p.m. or by appointment

Sample Syllabus

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Course Description

This course offers a broad introduction to international relations, the subfield of political science concerned with the behavior of states, the structure of the international system, and the major forces shaping world politics. The course examines the principal theoretical traditions of the field — realism, liberalism, and constructivism — and applies them to watershed historical episodes, to the contemporary security and economic environment, and to the major challenges facing the international system in the 2020s, including the Russian war on Ukraine, the deepening US–China strategic competition, the climate crisis, and the implications of artificial intelligence and emerging technology for international order. Discussions of theoretical and cross-regional issues will be accompanied by treatment of individual cases and contexts. This course counts for the International Relations distribution requirement.

Course Requirements

Two midterm examinations (15% each)	30%
Eleven reading quizzes (1% each)	11%
Research paper and discussion section presentation	19%
Final examination	30%
Participation	10%
Total	100%

Exams

The two midterms cover the material from the part of the course as indicated in this syllabus and consist of one over-arching essay question. The final examination covers the material from the entire course and consists of a long essay question.

Research Paper

For the research paper (12–15 pages), students choose a contemporary international relations puzzle and apply the theoretical concepts learned in class to analyze it. Each paper will have four sections: (1) an introduction with the relevant historical background; (2) a theoretical analysis applying the realist, liberal, and constructivist perspectives; (3) an empirical analysis of the case; and (4) an evaluation of which theoretical perspective best explains the outcome and why. More details will be provided later in the semester.

Policy on Artificial Intelligence

This course has a writing component, and what is important are your thoughts and your voice. As such, the use of AI is inconsistent with the goals of the course. You are not to use AI to generate your papers for this class, in whole or in part. AI is to be treated like any other source: if you use it for a paper, you are

to cite it as you would another source. You need to be able to analyze and synthesize it and draw your own conclusions. In addition, the process of writing, while often difficult and frustrating, is also a process of thinking. If you allow AI to do the thinking for you, you are missing out on a valuable exercise for your mind. Papers will be graded according to the depth of thought and development of ideas, and also to the use of your own "voice." The mantra for this course is always "writing is thinking."

Class Format

This class follows a lecture/discussion section format. Participation in the class discussion sections is an important component of the work for the class. Your reflections and questions in the discussion sections should be based on a careful consideration of the assigned readings for that week. Your participation grade will be assessed in conjunction with the teaching assistants and will be based on students' performance in the discussion sections. The quality of your contributions to discussions is more important than quantity.

Important Course Details

Please note the following important course details:

1. All deadlines are found in the course schedule and are not negotiable.
2. Attendance to both the lectures and discussion sections is mandatory.
3. Students are expected to come fully prepared for the discussion sections, having completed all assigned readings beforehand.
4. Students must abide by the code of academic conduct as outlined in the Georgetown Honor System.

Course Readings

The following books are required and are available for purchase at the Georgetown University Bookstore:

1. Henry R. Nau, *Perspectives on International Relations: Power, Institutions, and Ideas*, 7th edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press / SAGE, 2024.
2. Eric B. Shiraev and Vladislav M. Zubok, *International Relations*, 4th edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2024.
3. Robert J. Art and Robert Jervis, eds., *International Politics: Enduring Concepts and Contemporary Issues*, 14th edition. New York: Pearson, 2023.
4. Serhii Plokhy, *The Russo-Ukrainian War: The Return of History*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2023.

Additional readings — articles from *Foreign Affairs*, *International Security*, *World Politics*, and other journals, plus selected case studies — will be made available on Canvas.

Course Learning Goals

By the end of this course, students should have a working command of the core concepts in international relations: the structure of the international system; the principal theoretical traditions used to explain state behavior; the historical episodes through which those traditions have been developed and contested; and the major contemporary issues — security, economic, environmental, and technological — that shape the operation of the international system today.

Students will also develop the analytical and writing skills that international relations scholarship requires: the ability to read theoretical and empirical work critically, to apply concepts to cases, to construct an argument supported by evidence, and to engage seriously with positions other than their own.

Summary of Weekly Lecture Topics

PART ONE: THEORIES AND PARADIGMS

Module 1. THE FIELD: Introduction to International Relations (Aug 28)

Module 2. REALISM: From Thucydides to Mearsheimer (Sep 2–4)

Module 3. LIBERALISM: From Kant to Keohane (Sep 9–11)

Module 4. CONSTRUCTIVISM AND CRITICAL THEORY (Sep 16–18)

Module 5. FOREIGN POLICY DECISION-MAKING: Bureaucracy, Cognition, and the Cuban Missile Crisis (Sep 23–25)

FIRST STUDY DAY (Sep 30) AND FIRST MIDTERM EXAM (Oct 2)

PART TWO: THEORY AND HISTORY

Module 6. THE WORLD WARS: The Causes and Consequences of 1914 and 1939 (Oct 7–9)

Module 7. THE COLD WAR: From Containment to the End of History (Oct 16, no class Oct 14 — Columbus Day)

Module 8. THE UNIPOLAR MOMENT: 1991–2008 (Oct 21–23)

Module 9. THE RETURN OF GREAT POWER COMPETITION: Russia, Ukraine, and the Erosion of the Rules-Based Order (Oct 28–30)

SECOND STUDY DAY (Nov 4) AND SECOND MIDTERM EXAM (Nov 6)

PART THREE: CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

Module 10. INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ECONOMY: Trade, Finance, and the Politics of Globalization (Nov 11–13)

Module 11. US–CHINA STRATEGIC COMPETITION: From Engagement to Rivalry (Nov 18–20)

Module 12. CLIMATE, AI, AND THE NEW SECURITY AGENDA (Nov 25, no class Nov 27 — Thanksgiving)

Module 13. HUMAN RIGHTS, INTERNATIONAL LAW, AND HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION (Dec 2–4)

Module 14. WRAPPING THINGS UP: The Future of the International System (Dec 9)

Student Research Paper Presentations in Discussion Sections in November and December.

Final Examination: TBA

Detailed Module Outline

Module 1. The Field: Introduction to International Relations

August 28

Required readings:

- Nau, *Perspectives on International Relations*, Chapter 1: How to Think About International Relations
- Shiraev and Zubok, Chapter 1: Introducing International Relations

Discussion focus: What is international relations? How do scholars approach it as a field? Why theory matters.

Module 2. Realism

September 2 and 4

Required readings:

- Shiraev and Zubok, Chapter 2: The Realist Perspective
- Thucydides, "The Melian Dialogue" (Art and Jervis)
- Hans J. Morgenthau, "Six Principles of Political Realism" (Art and Jervis)

- Kenneth Waltz, "The Anarchic Structure of World Politics" (Art and Jervis)
- John J. Mearsheimer, "Structural Realism" (Canvas)

Discussion focus: Anarchy and self-help. The security dilemma. Balance of power and power transition. Why states do what they do.

Module 3. Liberalism

September 9 and 11

Required readings:

- Shiraev and Zubok, Chapter 3: The Liberal Perspective
- Michael Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs" (Art and Jervis)
- Robert O. Keohane, "International Institutions: Can Interdependence Work?" (Art and Jervis)
- G. John Ikenberry, "The End of Liberal International Order?" *Foreign Affairs* (Canvas)

Discussion focus: Cooperation under anarchy. The democratic peace. Institutions and interdependence. The rise and possible decline of the liberal international order.

Module 4. Constructivism and Critical Theory

September 16 and 18

Required readings:

- Shiraev and Zubok, Chapter 4: Alternative Views
- Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It" (Art and Jervis)
- Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change" (Canvas)

Discussion focus: Identity, norms, and the social construction of state interests. Why ideas matter. The critical theory challenge to mainstream IR.

Module 5. Foreign Policy Decision-Making

September 23 and 25

Required readings:

- Robert Jervis, "Hypotheses on Misperception," *World Politics* (Canvas)
- Graham Allison, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis," *American Political Science Review* (Canvas)

Discussion focus: Three lenses on the Cuban Missile Crisis. The role of misperception, bureaucracy, and individual cognition in shaping state behavior.

Module 6. The World Wars

October 7 and 9

Required readings:

- Nau, Chapters 3 and 4: World Wars I and II
- Keir Lieber, "The New History of World War I and What It Means for International Relations Theory," *International Security* (Canvas)
- Scott Sagan, "The Origins of the Pacific War," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (Canvas)

Discussion focus: Why did the great powers go to war in 1914 and 1939? What do the major theoretical perspectives say about the origins of total war?

Module 7. The Cold War

October 16 (no class October 14, Columbus Day Recess)

Required readings:

- Nau, Chapter 5: The Origins and End of the Cold War
- William Wohlforth, "Realism and the End of the Cold War," *International Security* (Canvas)
- John Lewis Gaddis, "The Long Peace" (Canvas)

Discussion focus: Containment, deterrence, and the bipolar system. Why did the Cold War end peacefully? What did the unipolar moment that followed mean for the international system?

Module 8. The Unipolar Moment, 1991–2008

October 21 and 23

Required readings:

- Nau, Chapter 6: The Post-Cold War World
- Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment" (Canvas)
- Stephen M. Walt, "Taming American Power," *Foreign Affairs* (Canvas)

Discussion focus: American primacy after 1991. The expansion of NATO. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The financial crisis and its consequences for American power.

Module 9. The Return of Great Power Competition: Russia and Ukraine

October 28 and 30

Required readings:

- Plokhy, *The Russo-Ukrainian War*, Introduction and Chapters 1–4
- Plokhy, *The Russo-Ukrainian War*, Chapters 5–8
- Mearsheimer, "Why the West is Principally Responsible for the Ukrainian Crisis" (Canvas)
- Michael McFaul, "Putin's War in Ukraine and the Failure of American Foreign Policy" (Canvas)

Discussion focus: How did we get here? Was the war inevitable? What does the conflict reveal about the underlying structure of the international system, and about the limits of the post-1991 order?

Module 10. International Political Economy

November 11 and 13

Required readings:

- Nau, Chapter 8: History of Globalization
- Nau, Chapter 9: How Globalization Works in Practice
- Dani Rodrik, "Has Globalization Gone Too Far?" (Canvas)

Discussion focus: The Bretton Woods system. Trade, finance, and the politics of interdependence. The backlash against globalization and the future of the open economic order.

Module 11. US–China Strategic Competition

November 18 and 20

Required readings:

- Aaron L. Friedberg, *Getting China Wrong*, selected chapters (Canvas)
- Kurt Campbell and Jake Sullivan, "Competition Without Catastrophe," *Foreign Affairs* (Canvas)
- Wang Jisi, "The Plot Against China?" *Foreign Affairs* (Canvas)

Discussion focus: From engagement to rivalry. Taiwan, the South China Sea, and the technology contest. Can the United States and China compete without war?

Module 12. Climate, AI, and the New Security Agenda

November 25 (no class November 27, Thanksgiving)

Required readings:

- Shiraev and Zubok, Chapter 9: The Environment
- Joshua Busby, "The Field of Climate and Security," *International Security* (Canvas)
- Henry Kissinger, Eric Schmidt, and Daniel Huttenlocher, *The Age of AI*, selected chapters (Canvas)

Discussion focus: Climate change as a security problem. The international politics of the energy transition. The implications of artificial intelligence for warfare, escalation, and the global balance of power.

Module 13. Human Rights, International Law, and Humanitarian Intervention

December 2 and 4

Required readings:

- Shiraev and Zubok, Chapter 10: Humanitarian Problems
- Samantha Power, "Bystanders to Genocide," *The Atlantic* (Canvas)
- Stephen Hopgood, *The Endtimes of Human Rights*, selected chapters (Canvas)

Discussion focus: The development of international human rights regimes. The Responsibility to Protect. Why have humanitarian interventions so often failed? Is the human rights regime in retreat?

Module 14. Wrapping Things Up: The Future of the International System

December 9

Required readings:

- Nau, Chapter 16: The Future of International Relations
- G. John Ikenberry, "The Next Liberal Order," *Foreign Affairs* (Canvas)

Discussion focus: Final lecture and review. What kind of international order is emerging? What does the field still get right, and what does it need to rethink?

General Article Databases

Lauinger Library Resources for international relations: ProQuest Political Science, EBSCOhost Military and Government Collection, *International Political Science Abstracts*, Nexis Uni, Academic Search Premier, JSTOR, and the journals *International Security*, *World Politics*, *Foreign Affairs*, *International Organization*, and the *American Political Science Review*.

As of August 2025. Subject to revision.