

International Relations – Course Syllabus

Course Information

Introduction

This course is for intellectually curious students interested in Politics and International Relations (IR) who want to gain a better understanding of some of the most urgent and important problems in the world today, such why states go to war, the obstacles to international cooperation in addressing global problems such as pandemics and the climate crisis, and how governments respond to and manage globalisation and transnational threats to peace and security. This is *not* a course on current affairs – rather, the objective is to equip students with the analytical tools and skills to study and make sense of international relations and to thereby gain a better understanding of how the world works. To do this, we will combine in-depth case studies and examples with theoretical and conceptual frameworks and we will tackle a range of topics that are relevant to both the history of global politics and to contemporary issues. By the end of the course, students will be familiar with the core aspects of the academic study of International Relations and their relevance for topics including armed conflict, international security, global governance, globalisation and the role of international organisations such as the United Nations.

Overview of topics

1. Introduction – Core Concepts and Approaches
2. War and Peace in International Relations
3. International Security
4. Global Governance and Globalisation
5. The United Nations
6. Review and Looking Ahead: Where Next for International Relations?

Teaching

In our seminars and tutorials, the emphasis will be on in-depth discussion of ideas and real-world cases, not lecturing. You will come to the seminars prepared with questions that you want to talk about and these will form the core of the discussions. I will guide the seminars and provide structure and support, but the purpose of the seminars is for us all to work together on gaining a better understanding of the topic at hand.

To make the most of the seminars, you will need to read widely, guided by this syllabus, but also read *actively* – this means making notes when you read and following up on the things that interest you. For all the readings (or videos etc), write down the main point (try to summarise it in one sentence), why you think it is (or isn't) important, what was most and least interesting, what you didn't understand, and if you think there are links or connections to the other readings or other examples you know about.

Most importantly, for **each seminar** I want you to **prepare 3 questions or discussion points that you want to talk about**. These might be about something in the reading you didn't

understand (this will happen! Use the seminars to clarify anything that is not clear), or something that you disagreed with, or you found particularly interesting and want to explore further.

Expectations

This syllabus describes all the compulsory readings and assignments, and the seminars and tutorials will only be effective if they are completed. You will gain more from the course if you also do some of the optional readings.

It is very likely that in our seminars we will have differences of opinion and will see the world through different perspectives – this is a good thing, and will be the basis for productive discussion and new insights, even as we challenge each other and put across our arguments in the most compelling and convincing way we can. It also means that we must always treat each other with the utmost respect and tolerance.

I also take academic integrity very seriously and expect that your essays will be your own work (we will discuss things like plagiarism and how to write good essays during the course).

Pre-Course Reading

Start with this article from a former Chair of the British International Studies Association:

<https://www.bisa.ac.uk/articles/what-international-relations>

Watch these YouTube videos of scholars giving brief introductions to some of the main approaches in the study of International Relations

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLhQpDGfX5e7C6FA5IYU3VPYN7kWHI1mxQ>

Now watch this video by IR professor (and former policymaker in the US government), Joseph Nye https://www.ted.com/talks/joseph_nye_global_power_shifts and this discussion with Anne-Marie Slaughter (also both a professor and a US policymaker)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKlR9bdxZb8>

Read Part I (Introduction and Chapter 1, pages 5-34) of *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations* by John Baylis, Steve Smith and Patricia Owens. You should be able to access these sections using the Google Books preview [[Link](#)]. Don't worry if a lot of the concepts and theories seem confusing and unfamiliar – the point is to start getting an overview of what the academic study of IR looks like. Make a note of any key ideas or themes that you want to talk about more in the seminars.

Read this article from Foreign Policy magazine: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/02/20/its-never-been-a-better-time-to-study-international-relations-trump-foreign-policy> (you should be able to read a few articles on Foreign Policy for free without getting a subscription).

It's very US-focused, but think about the issues raised and how they might apply more generally. In the first seminar, we'll talk more about why you want to study International Relations.

Finally, read a *selection* of these articles and reports from the media and from think tanks (pick 2 or 3). Start thinking about how what you've read or listened to so far might help you understand the events and issues they describe, or how they contribute to the study of IR.

[Biden, Joseph R. 2020. 'Why America Must Lead Again'. Foreign Affairs, 16 April 2020.](#) (a PDF of the article is [also available here](#)) Now read these responses:

[Beinart, Peter. 'Biden Wants America to Lead the World. It Shouldn't.' *The New York Times*, 2 December 2020.](#)

[Goldgeier, James, and Bruce W. Jentleson. 'The United States Is Not Entitled to Lead the World'. *Foreign Affairs*, 25 September 2020.](#)

[Blazakis, Jason M., and Naureen Chowdhury Fink. 2021. 'The International Far-Right Terrorist Threat Requires a Multilateral Response'. *Lawfare*. 4 April 2021.](#)

Council on Foreign Relations [Conflicts to Watch in 2021](#)

Council on Foreign Relations [Backgrounder on the G7](#)

International Crisis Group [Watch List 2021](#)

[Lieven, Anatol. 'Western Nations Are Repeating the Mistakes of 1914'. *The National Interest*. 22 December 2018.](#)

[Zvobgo, Kelebogile, and Meredith Loken. 'Why Race Matters in International Relations'. *Foreign Policy*, 19 June 2020.](#)

Optional Further Reading

Some introductory textbooks that might be useful (you can use Google Books to read some sections):

Brown, Chris, and Kirsten Ainley. *Understanding International Relations*. 3rd ed. Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Dunne, Timothy, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith, eds. *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*. 4th ed. Oxford University Press, 2016. [[Google Books preview](#)]

Frieden, Jeffrey A., David A. Lake, and Kenneth A. Schultz. *World Politics: Interests, Interactions, Institutions*. Third edition, International student edition. New York: WWNorton, 2016.

Jackson, Robert, Georg Sørensen, and Jørgen Møller. *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches*. 7th ed. Oxford University Press, 2018. [[Google Books preview](#)]

Tickner, Arlene B., and Ole Wæver, eds. *International Relations Scholarship around the World*. Worlding beyond the West. Routledge, 2009. [[Google Books preview](#)]

Young, John W., and John Kent. *International Relations Since 1945*. *International Relations Since 1945*. 3rd ed. Oxford University Press, 2020. [[Google Books preview](#)]

If you're feeling ambitious, try some of these articles from the Annual Review of Political Science (a journal that summarises key developments in academic research on Politics and International Relations). These will be more challenging, but will give you a good idea of how academics approach the study of international relations.

Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, and Alastair Smith. 'Domestic Explanations of International Relations'. Annual Review of Political Science 15, no. 1 (2012): 161–81.

<https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/full/10.1146/annurev-polisci-070209-174835>

Fearon, James D. 'Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy, and Theories of International Relations'. Annual Review of Political Science 1, no. 1 (1998): 289–313.

<https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/full/10.1146/annurev.polisci.1.1.289>

Finnemore, Martha, and Kathryn Sikkink. 'Taking Stock: The Constructivist Research Program in International Relations and Comparative Politics'. Annual Review of Political Science 4, no. 1 (1 June 2001): 391–416. <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/full/10.1146/annurev.polisci.4.1.391>

Kertzer, Joshua D., and Dustin Tingley. 'Political Psychology in International Relations: Beyond the Paradigms'. Annual Review of Political Science 21, no. 1 (2018): 319–39.

<https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/full/10.1146/annurev-polisci-041916-020042>

Walt, Stephen M. 'The Relationship Between Theory and Policy in International Relations'. Annual Review of Political Science 8 (15 June 2005): 23–48.

<https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/full/10.1146/annurev.polisci.7.012003.104904>

Pre-Course Work

Task 1

Prepare 3 questions/discussion points for the first seminar. These can be based on the compulsory or optional readings or both. Focus on the things you want to explore in more detail during the course.

Task 2

Prepare some brief notes on what you think is the most important problem in international politics today. This could be a short-term crisis like the war in Yemen or a long-term challenge like poverty or climate change. In the first seminar, you will present your ideas (in no more than **2-3 minutes**) and explain why you think the issue is so important. You may want to include some historical background to the current situation, and tell us who are the main actors (these may be states, organisations, individuals and so on), what are their interests and objectives, and how the situation may change over the next few years.

Seminar 1 Introduction to International Relations

The aim of the first seminar is to start equipping you with the tools and skills to study international relations. This will likely mean learning some new concepts and theories that are unfamiliar to you, and we will discuss the purpose and value of different approaches to understanding and explaining international relations. We will do this by trying to connect these approaches to the issues you have identified as being important (see details of pre-course work described above), so make sure you have prepared your notes and are ready to present your ideas to your colleagues.

We will also use this seminar to discuss the essays you will write this week.

Reading

Acharya, Amitav. 'What "Introduction to International Relations" Misses Out: Civilizations, World Orders, and the Rise of the West', 16 December 2020.

<https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3750112>.

Read the introduction to *International relations and non-western thought: imperialism, colonialism, and investigations of global modernity* by Robbie Shilliam, pages 1-11 [Available via Google Books preview at this [link](#)]

Task 1

Same as the pre-course work – make sure you have your 3 questions/discussion points based on any of the readings listed so far.

Task 2

Pick **one** of these concepts and write 2-3 sentences explaining what you think it means, and give some real-world examples: sovereignty, security, the international community, anarchy, power, empire, colonialism, globalisation, geopolitics.

Optional further reading

See the optional pre-course readings (the articles in the Annual Review of Political Science)

Seminar 2 War and Peace in International Politics

In this seminar we will discuss questions such as why wars start, why they are so hard to end, and what are the necessary conditions for peace. We will look at wars *between* states, wars *within* states (civil wars), and other forms of armed conflict.

Reading

Take a look at this website <https://ourworldindata.org/war-and-peace>

Braumoeller, Bear F. 'World War II Was 75 Years Ago. But Big Wars Can Still Happen.' *Washington Post*, 2 September 2020. [\[Link\]](#)

Goldstein, Joshua S., and Steven Pinker. 'War Really Is Going Out of Style'. *The New York Times*, 17 December 2011. [\[Link\]](#)

Human Security Report Project. *Human Security Report 2013: The Decline in Global Violence: Evidence, Explanation, and Contestation*. Human Security Press, 2013. Available online: [link to PDF](#) [Read as much as you can of the Overview and Part I]

Task 1

Prepare 3 questions/discussion points based on the readings.

Task 2

Pick one of countries or regions at risk of conflict from the International Crisis Group [Watch List 2021](#). Prepare some **brief** notes to present during the seminar – be prepared to talk for about 2 minutes and tell us the most important details (what's happening where and why, and who's involved).

Optional further reading

United Nations and World Bank. 2018. *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*. World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28337>.

Walter, Barbara F. 2017. "The New New Civil Wars." *Annual Review of Political Science* 20 (1): 469–86. <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev-polisci-060415-093921>

Seminar 3 International Security

This seminar will build on the previous one and expand the discuss to include a wider range of possible threats to international peace and security and different ways of understanding international security. We will discuss things like so called 'fragile' or 'failing' states, transnational organised crime, and terrorism, and attempts to redefine traditional security by putting the focus on human rights and wellbeing – so-called 'human security'.

Reading

Take a look at this website from the OECD <https://www.oecd.org/dac/states-of-fragility-fa5a6770-en.htm> and read the executive summary of the States of Fragility 2020 report here [\[link\]](#)

Now read this brief statement from the United Nations <https://www.un.org/en/un75/new-era-conflict-and-violence>.

Lastly, read this article by Mary Kaldor, Mary Martin and Sabine Selchow on human security [\[PDF here\]](#)

Task 1

Prepare 3 questions/discussion points based on the readings.

Task 2

What do you think is today's biggest threat to international security? Prepare 3-5 bullet points to justify your choice and to discuss during the seminar.

Optional further reading

Read the introduction (pages 1-11) of *Security studies: an introduction* [[Google Books link](#)]

Tutorial Work 1

Essays

We will discuss the essay questions during the seminar on Monday. You can choose one of these questions or, if you want to write about a different topic, let me know and we will agree on a different question.

1. Is the distinction between domestic politics and international relations useful?
2. 'The main purpose of the study of international relations is to understand the consequences of international anarchy'. Do you agree?
3. Is soft power now more useful for states than hard power?
4. Do individuals matter in international relations?

Essays should be **1,500 words** (+/- 150)

Optional extension work

Write a briefing memo based on the notes you prepared for the pre-course work on what you think is the most important issue in international politics today. This memo should be addressed to a government department or International Organisation (e.g. the Foreign Office, the State Department, the United Nations). Explain in **no more than 500 words** why the issue is important and why it should be a priority. Decide what you think is the most relevant background information and how you think the situation will develop in the short-, medium- and long-term.

Seminar 4 Globalisation and Global Governance

In this seminar we turn to questions of globalisation and how states and international organisations and other actors have tried to manage a world of sovereign states that is characterised by interdependence and transnational policy problems. We will focus in particular on some of today's major global challenges – the climate crisis, pandemics, financial instability, poverty, development and global inequality – and how the world has responded. Whereas in the first week we were mostly focused on *conflict* between states, our focus in this seminar and the next will be more on the possibility of *cooperation* and why this is often so difficult.

Reading

Davies, Sara E., and Clare Wenham. 'Why the COVID-19 Response Needs International Relations'. *International Affairs* 96, no. 5 (1 September 2020): 1227–51.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iaa135>.

Hale, Thomas. 'Transnational Actors and Transnational Governance in Global Environmental Politics'. *Annual Review of Political Science* 23, no. 1 (2020): 203–20.

<https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev-polisci-050718-032644>

Kumaravadivel Guruparan, and Jennifer Zerk. 'Influence of Soft Law Grows in International Governance', 17 June 2021. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/06/influence-soft-law-grows-international-governance>.

Task 1

Prepare 3 questions/discussion points based on the readings.

Task 2

Pick a global/transnational problem that you are most interested in. Who is most affected by this problem? What are the factors that will make it easier or harder for states to cooperate in dealing with this issue? Is there a role for non-state actors? Prepare 2-3 points to discuss in the seminar.

Optional further reading

Read the start of the introduction to *Who governs the globe?*, by Deborah Avant, Martha Finnemore and Susan Sell (pages 1-25) available using [Google Books preview](#)

Seminar 5 The United Nations

Building on the previous seminar, we now turn to the role of the United Nations – an international organisation that is often criticised but is also often defended as indispensable and crucial for managing a range of global challenges. We will discuss the various functions of the UN (such as peacekeeping and development), consider explanations for its successes and failures, and try to understand the role of international organisations more generally in world politics.

Reading

Charter of the United Nations <https://www.un.org/en/charter-united-nations/> [Skim read]

Have a browse of the UN's websites for peacekeeping <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en> and the Sustainable Development Goals <https://sdgs.un.org/>.

United Nations. 2004. *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility : Report of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change*. [[Link to PDF](#)] **Read the Foreword (pages vii – x), the Synopsis (pages 1-5), and the Synopses for Parts 1 to 4.**

Weiss, Thomas G. *The United Nations and Changing World Politics*. 8th Edition. Routledge, 2019. You can download the first chapter [here](#) (click on 'Preview PDF'). **Read the introduction (pages 1 – 21)**

[Ryder, Hannah, Anna Baisch, and Ovigwe Eguegu. 'Decolonizing the United Nations Means Abolishing the Permanent Five'. *Foreign Policy*, 17 September 2020.](#)

Task 1

Prepare 3 questions/discussion points based on the readings.

Optional further reading

Read the rest of *A More Secure World* and chapter 1 of the Thomas Weiss book linked to above.

The report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty [[available here](#)]

Seminar 6 Review and Looking Ahead: Where Next for International Relations?

We will use the last seminar to review and consolidate everything from the course. It will be an opportunity for us to return to any topics or questions that you feel were not given enough attention in earlier seminars, or anything you think that we left out and should have discussed. This can include substantive topics, such as international security or the UN, more practical skills-based questions such as essay writing, or any questions you may have about studying international relations at university.

We can also use this seminar to talk about some of the 'frontier' issues in the study of international relations, that is, looking to the future and trying to identify what the major challenges will be for world politics in years to come. This may include environmental threats, the consequences of technological developments such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, or the rise of China as a Great Power. We will discuss this in more detail at the start of week 2 and decide exactly what we want to discuss, and I have included a few ideas in the section on optional reading.

Task 1

Prepare some brief notes (no more than half a page) on what you have learnt during the course – what did you find most interesting or surprising, what do you want to learn more about. Try to also think about the links between the different topics we have studied – what are the underlying themes that connect all the different topics, what (if any) are the common concepts and approaches that we can use to make sense of different questions?

Task 2

Identify a topic that you want to learn more about when the course is over. What are the key questions you want to answer? How will you go about answering these questions – where do you need to look for answers, what information do you think you'll need to gather?

Optional further reading

Texas National Security Review. 'Policy Roundtable: Artificial Intelligence and International Security', 2 June 2020. <http://tnsr.org/roundtable/policy-roundtable-artificial-intelligence-and-international-security/>.

Uexkull, Nina von, and Halvard Buhaug. 'Is Climate Change Driving Global Conflict?' *Political Violence at a Glance*, 1 February 2021. <https://politicalviolenceataglance.org/2021/02/01/is-climate-change-driving-global-conflict/>.

Walt, Stephen M. 'China and the United States Are in a Race to Lose Power'. *Foreign Policy*, 17 August 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/08/17/china-and-the-united-states-are-in-a-race-to-lose-power/>.

Tutorial Work 2

Essays

We will discuss the essay questions at the start of the week. You can choose one of these questions or, if you want to write about a different topic, let me know and we will agree on a different question.

1. Has globalisation eroded the distinction between domestic and international politics?
2. How effective is the United Nations in managing global security issues?
3. 'States are no longer the most important actors in international politics'. Do you agree?
4. Why do states find it so hard to cooperate on solving global problems?

Essays should be **1,500 words** (+/- 150)

Optional extension work

Write a briefing memo of **no more than 500 words** on a transnational challenge for the UN Secretary-General. Identify the problem, explain why it is important, and discuss what type of international cooperation is necessary and what the UN's role should be.