POGO 750: Civil Wars and Stabilization in Africa
(**Draft Syllabus**)  
Spring 2020

Mondays, 7:20-10:00pm  
Location: ARLVM, 475

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Course Overview
This course provides a survey of the most pressing security issues facing policymakers in contemporary Africa. We will examine topics such as the causes of civil war and political violence on the continent, the rise of extremist groups such as the Islamic State and Boko Haram, counterinsurgency and counterterrorism strategies, gender-based violence, military coups, and humanitarian interventions and peacekeeping operations. The course will also consider emerging security challenges such as climate change and intensifying great power competition in Africa among states like China and Russia. Students will become familiar with major policy debates as well as state-of-the-art research in the field.

Learning Objectives
Students who actively engage with seminar discussions, course readings, and assignments will:

1. Become familiar with the most important security challenges facing Africa.
2. Improve their understanding of how and why African countries experience armed conflict, as well as potential remedies for violence.
3. Understand how global security issues like climate change, great power competition, and violent extremism are affecting African states and societies.
4. Be prepared to analyze and critique international policy responses to conflict, peace, and stabilization in Africa in a rigorous and informed manner.
5. Be able to ask original research questions that might advance the frontiers of knowledge in the study of security in Africa.

Required Readings
All required readings for the course will be available on Blackboard.

Assignments and Grading
The course will be run as a seminar. It is therefore essential for students to do the required readings and come prepared to participate in class discussion each week. Attendance is mandatory; if you must be absent for a legitimate reason (i.e. medical issues or religious observance), it is your obligation to notify me within a reasonable amount of time.
The course requirements consist of one critical response memo (20%), one policy memo (20%), a final research paper (40%), and seminar participation (20%).

**Critical Response Memo (20%):** Students will write one response memo that critically analyzes one or more of the assigned readings for one week. The memo should be approximately 1000 words (double-spaced in 12-point font) and will be due in class the week of the seminar when the readings are discussed. Students will be assigned due dates for response memos at the beginning of the semester.

A high-quality response memo should offer more than just a summary of the reading(s). Rather, it should offer a critical analysis. For example, memos might address questions such as:

- what are the main strengths and/or weaknesses of the author’s argument?
- Do you find the theory or argument(s) convincing?
- Is the empirical evidence compelling?
- Does the reading offer insight for other issues beyond the scope of the study?

**Policy Memo (20%):** Students will write one policy memo that identifies a contemporary security issue in an African country and provides policy guidance that is addressed either to the US government or an international organization. Policy memos should be no more than 5 pages (double-spaced, 12-point font). Your memo should clearly describe the scope, significance, and causes of the security problem, and provide potential policy recommendations (including how the recommendations would be implemented).

For advice on writing effective policy memos, see the following blog post from the Woodrow Wilson School: [https://wws.princeton.edu/admissions/wws-blog/item/policy-memo-writing-tips](https://wws.princeton.edu/admissions/wws-blog/item/policy-memo-writing-tips).

Policy memos are due by Friday, March 6.

**Research Paper (40%):** Students will write one longer research paper (15-20 pages, double-spaced in 12 point-font) that examines a contemporary security problem in one or more African countries. Topics for research papers must be approved by the instructor by the 8th week of the course.

Based on their research papers, students will also make in-class presentations in the last week of the course (for 5% of the paper grade). The presentations will be an opportunity for students to share their findings with the rest of the class and receive feedback to help improve their final papers. Details about presentation format will be discussed beforehand.

Final research papers are due Friday, May 8.
Academic Integrity

Faculty in the Schar School have zero tolerance for academic dishonesty (e.g. plagiarism) and will strictly enforce Mason’s honor code. Please familiarize yourself with the Honor Code here: https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/.

If you have any doubts about the rules concerning plagiarism, please ask for clarification. No grade or assignment is worth academic misconduct.

Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC.

Laptop / Cellphone Policy

To facilitate an engaged and respectful learning environment, students are encouraged to take notes during seminars using a paper and pen/pencil (research has demonstrated that taking notes by hand is associated with better learning and performance outcomes). If you must use a laptop to take notes during class, please disable the internet connection. The use of other technology (i.e. mobile phones) is not permitted; please silence your phones during class.

Communications Policy

All course-related communications should be conducted via Mason email or through Blackboard. While I will try to respond to email as soon as possible, do not expect immediate replies in evenings or on weekends. If you must be absent for class, it is your obligation inform me beforehand.

Course Schedule (subject to change)

Part I: Root Causes of Political Violence in Africa

Week 1 (January 27) – Introduction

Week 2 (February 3) – Historical Context and Colonial Legacies


Week 3 (February 10) – Structural and Material Causes of Conflict


Week 4 (February 17) – Ideational Causes of Conflict


Part II: Contemporary Security Challenges in Africa

Week 5 (February 24) – Extremist Groups and Jihadists


Week 6 (March 2) – Coups and Civil-Military Relations


**Week 7 (March 16) – Gender Violence, Atrocities, and Child Soldiering**


Part III: Intervention and Peace Operations

**Week 8 (March 23) – Humanitarian Intervention**


**Week 9 (March 30) – Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding**


**Week 10 (April 6) – Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism**


**Week 11 (April 13) – War Crimes Tribunals and the International Criminal Court**


Part IV: Emerging Security Challenges in Africa

**Week 12 (April 20) – Climate Change**


**Week 13 (April 27) – Russia, China, and Great Power Competition in Africa**

• Brigety, Reuben. 2018. “A Post-America Africa: The U.S. is Falling Behind.” *Foreign Affairs*.

**Week 14 (May 4) – Student Presentations and Conclusion**