Govt 322-02: International Relations Theory

T, R 1:30 – 2:45 p.m  
Professor Ahsan Butt  
Innovation Hall 132  
Email: abutt4@gmu.edu

Office hours: R 10:30 – noon  
and by appointment

Course description

This course is an upper level undergraduate seminar on theories, concepts, and issues in International Relations. The course is divided into three main sections. The first deals with the dominant paradigms, debates, and theoretical approaches in the study of International Relations, including but not limited to realism, liberalism, and constructivism. The second covers the causes and consequences of conflict and cooperation in international politics through a theoretical lens. The third applies the theoretical lessons gleaned from the first two sections to practical matters in global politics today, including the rise of China, the Israel-Iran dispute, climate change, and the future of the European Union, amongst others.

Course materials

There is only one book required for this class: Conflict After the Cold War: Arguments on Causes of War and Peace by Richard K. Betts (ed). The book is available in the campus bookstore as well as online stores such as Amazon.com. Most readings for the class will be journal articles and selections from other books; these will be placed on Blackboard.

Course requirements

Students’ final grades will be determined by their performance in four areas:

- 10 in-class quizzes (25%). These will be based on the readings for the day the quiz is held. I will drop your two lowest scores so that only eight will count to your final grade.

- 2 short papers (30%). These papers will be written in response to a question I pose to the class and will be due one week after I hand out the assignment. They must be 800-1000 words in length, not including citations and/or footnotes, and have 1-inch margins, size 12 font, and be double-spaced. Only hard copies will be accepted.

- 1 literature review (30%). A report on the state of the latest research on a question or topic that relates to IR theory, broadly conceived. This task involves (a) finding a topic relating to international politics that interests you, (b) posing a direct research question relating to that topic, and (c) reading research (mainly peer-reviewed journals and books published by university presses) that can help you answer your question. The literature
review must not merely summarize the latest findings in IR research, but also synthesize them. The final paper is due at the end of the semester and must be roughly 1500 words, not including citations and/or footnotes, and have 1-inch margins, size 12 font, and be double-spaced. Only hard copies will be accepted.

- Class participation (15%). This is a seminar course and, as such, depends critically upon students’ active participation in class. Students must come to class prepared, having completed all the required readings, and be ready to discuss and debate issues raised in the readings and lectures. I do not take attendance, but it is obviously challenging to participate if you are not actually present.

**Late assignments**

Assignments must be turned in at the time and place designated on the syllabus. Failure to turn in an assignment on time is unacceptable except with the prior agreement of the instructor (which will be given only in exceptional circumstances, such as a documented illness or family emergency). Except in documented cases of illness or emergency, a penalty of up to a full letter grade may be assessed for each day the assignment is late.

**Academic integrity**

GMU is an Honor Code university; please see the Office for Academic Integrity for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else’s work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification.

**Students with disabilities or special needs**

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474, http://ods.gmu.edu. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS.

**Email policy**

In general, it is best to discuss any issues or concerns with me in person, either in class or in office hours. This is especially true for issues that require elaboration or a back-and-forth exchange. I will be happy to respond to emails in normal business hours (M-F, 8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m.) that require a short, concise response and aim to do so in a timely manner. However, there will be occasions when it takes me 24 hours or more to respond.
**Respect for your colleagues**

Being in a seminar involves debating, arguing, and disagreeing. While doing so, it is incumbent upon students to respect their peers and colleagues and maintaining a certain level of decorum and civility in class. In addition, you can show respect for your colleagues by:

- Showing up to class on time.
- Sitting in the back row if you wish to use a laptop.
- Turning your phones off (not on vibrate/silent modes, but completely off) when in class.

**Course schedule**

Jan 24: Introduction

Jan 26: Levels and frameworks of analysis


Jan 31: Realism I

- Betts, pp. 69-82 (chapters by Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Hobbes).

Feb 2: Realism II – QUIZ 1

- Betts, pp. 107-132, 425-441 (chapters by Gilpin, Blainey, and Jervis).

Feb 7: Liberalism I


Feb 9: Liberalism II – QUIZ 2


Feb 14: Constructivism I

- Betts, pp. 214-235 (chapter by Wendt).

Feb 16: Constructivism II – QUIZ 3

- Betts, pp. 244-293 (chapters by Mead, Mueller, Finnemore, and Tickner).

Feb 21: Structuralism

- Short paper 1 given out, due Feb 28.

Feb 23: Domestic politics and cooperation


Feb 28: State violence and deterrence


Mar 2: Nuclear deterrence – QUIZ 4

- Betts, pp. 465-476 (chapter by Waltz).

Mar 7: Terrorism and unconventional warfare


Mar 9: Interdependence and globalization I – QUIZ 5


Mar 14: NO CLASS – Spring break

Mar 16: NO CLASS – Spring break

Mar 21: Interdependence and globalization II


Mar 23: Perceptions and signaling – QUIZ 6


Mar 28: Religion in International Relations

- Short paper 2 given out, due Apr 4.

Mar 30: The U.S. and unipolarity I

- Betts, pp. 6-18 (chapter by Fukuyama).
- Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment,” *Foreign Affairs* 70(1).

Apr 4: The U.S. and unipolarity II

Apr 6: The rise of China – QUIZ 7

- David Shambaugh, “China’s Soft-Power Push,” *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2015).

Apr 11: The European Union: past, present, and future

- David Art, “The German Rescue of the Eurozone: How Germany is Getting the Europe It Always Wanted,” *Political Science Quarterly* 130(2): 181-212.

Apr 13: Iran, Israel, and nuclear weapons – QUIZ 8

- Matthew Kroenig, “Time to attack Iran: Why a Strike is the Least Bad Option,” *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2012).

Apr 18: Crises and (in)stability in South Asia


Apr 20: The long peace in South America


Apr 25: The global poor – QUIZ 9

Apr 27: Climate change and human security in Africa


May 2: Responsibility to protect – QUIZ 10

- Alex Bellamy, “Responsibility to Protect or Trojan Horse? The Crisis in Darfur and Humanitarian Intervention after Iraq,” *Ethics and International Affairs* 19(2): 31-54.

May 4: NO CLASS – Writing period

May 8: Literature reviews due in my mailbox (Robinson A 201) at noon.