

GEOPOLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Economics and Politics

Course contact hours: 45

Recommended credits: 6 ECTS – 3 US credits

OBJECTIVES

In its conventional meaning, the notion of geopolitics conjures up images of complex, sometimes even tragic political games played by powerful states with the intention of maximizing their position in the international (geo)political arena. Although this is certainly one set of dynamics geopolitical models try to explain, the scope of this fascinating discipline is far wider and involves much more than states and their grand strategies. Geopolitics, in its modern understanding, is as much about the course of action that states pursue when they engage in international power politics as it is about the many ways in which each state justifies those actions before its domestic constituency. Geopolitics means exploring different perspectives about the interactive relations between human and physical geographies. Geopolitical codes and geopolitical imaginations constitute the fundamental immaterial basis on which states are legitimized to act and, increasingly, on which they are held accountable by their citizens and/or international organizations. Moreover, states have lost their monopoly over the creation and mobilization of geopolitical codes and power. The progressive erosion of the meaning of borders in the wake of the globalization of economic and political processes has meant that new actors, both above and below the state, have come to concur in the making of geopolitics.

The objective of this course is to analyze the evolution over time of the discipline of geopolitics and its practical impacts in both global and domestic politics. It will also analyze a set of issues of critical importance for the present and future dynamics of interactions among states and, most importantly, the people that live within them.

This course does not aim to give you the ability of predicting the future or making certain statements about what policies geopolitical actors should follow in any given situation as to maximize their benefits. It would be unrealistic and intellectually flawed if it attempted to do so. Conversely, this course is about providing a set of ideal categories and practical notions that will empower you to critically interpret the construction of geopolitical narratives and the ways in which they are acted upon.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

In the first part of the course you will be confronted with the account of how classical and critical geopolitics have developed over time and how they have dealt with the major questions regarding geopolitical thinking: structure and agency, territory, borders, the meaning and the role of states and state sovereignty. This first part will therefore establish the conceptual groundwork of the discipline of geopolitics. In turn, it will help you to analyze

and question many of the aspects of your relation with the different scales of territory in which you live (your city, your state, your country and the rest of the world), your national identity and, more in general, the way states manage their territory on the basis of their authoritative claim to sovereignty. We will finally ask if there is anything we can learn from the history of geopolitics in terms of hegemonic power and if we can infer some kind of underlying logic and tentatively sketch out future geopolitical scenarios.

The second part of the course will build on your newly acquired analytical skills and guide you towards the exploration of a selected set of issues that define the current geopolitical landscape. It will take the form of seminars where different groups of students will lead a in class debate on the specific topic. You are expected to apply your conceptual toolkit in order to identify structure and agency relations in each of the topic and to analyze current state of affairs and make projections into the future.

CONTENT

Introduction to Geopolitics:

What brings you to Geopolitics?

A brief History of Geopolitics

Classical and Critical Geopolitics

Framework for Understanding Geopolitics:

Key Concepts: place, scale, region, territory and network

Structure and Agency

What is Power?

Visualizing Global Space / Turning Time into Space:

Structuring the world as a structured whole

Binary Geographies

'Orientalism'

Spaces of Backwardness

Geopolitical Agency: Geopolitical Codes & Their Justification:

Geopolitical Codes: scales and usages

Cultural Aspects

Popular Culture and Foreign Policy

Dynamic Geopolitical Codes

Embedding Geopolitics within National Identity:

Nation, State, Nation-State

Nationalism and its manifestations

Gender Roles, Nationalism and Geopolitical Codes

Nationalism and Globalization

The Three Ages of Geopolitics

Boundary geopolitics: Shaky foundations of the world political map?

The role of boundaries in geopolitics

Boundaries, borders, borderlands, frontier

Territorial constructions other than states

Case studies: Palestine-Israel and the Korean Peninsula

Network Geopolitics: Terrorism and Social Movements

Meta- geography

Geopolitics of Globalization

Transnational Social Movements: Peace Movements

Terrorism and Globalization

Cyber warfare and Cyber security

Globalization: already under threat?

The Surge of Populism

Geopolitical Structure: Predicting the Future?

Exploring Structure: Modelsky's geopolitical model

A valid Model? Imperial Overstretch?

Testing the Model: the War on Terror, China, the EU

Agnew: A New Age of Geopolitics? A New spatiality of power?

China: Peaceful Rising or Quest for Hegemony?

Emerging Countries: An early crisis?

Weak, Failed and Collapsed States

Africa: Between Hope and Despair

The United Nations: Reform or Die?

Regionalism and The European Union

Environment, Security and Conflict

Energy Security and the Geopolitics of Energy:

Energy independence or energy interdependence?

Energy Security: Strategies for action

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

In-class Seminars	20%
Mid-term exam	20%
Final Paper	25%
Class Participation	15%
Final Exam	20%

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Recommended reading:

Flint, C. (2011) *Introduction to Geopolitics*, New York: Routledge

Agnew, J. (2003) *Geopolitics: re-visioning world politics*, 2nd edition, New York: Routledge

Baylis, J.; Steve Smith and Patricia Owens (eds.) (2011) *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Dittmer, J. & Sharp, Joanne (eds.) (2014) *Geopolitics: An Introductory Reading*, New York: Routledge

Suggested Academic Journals and Magazines:

[Geopolitics](#)

[Antipode: A radical journal of geography](#)

[Survival: global politics and strategy](#)

[Foreign Policy](#)

[Foreign Affairs](#)

[Stratfor: Global intelligence](#)