The Political Economy of National Security and International Conflict
PLSC 380U

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Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:00-11:30am, and by appointment

Course Description and Purpose

This course will examine the interaction of economic and political concerns in shaping state policies about national security and international conflict. We will cover a range of topics in three units. The first focuses on the economic and political foundations of national military power. In this part of the course, we will consider how states define their security interests, how they extract the resources they need for military use from society, and how societal resistance to this intrusion can influence mobilization and wartime strategy. The second unit focuses on the economic and security dimensions of interaction among states in the international system. We will examine how interdependence can be used to prepare for war or to coerce other states. We will also consider whether interdependence promotes peace or war. The third unit focuses on the economic and political structure of the international system, particularly how the rise and fall of dominant powers shapes the character of international political life.

This course is a 4-credit course, which means that students are expected to do at least 12.5 hours of course-related work or activity each week during the semester. This includes scheduled class lecture/discussion meeting times as well as time spent completing assigned readings, preparing written assignments, and other course-related tasks.

This course counts toward the social science general education requirement (category N). It counts for several purposes within the political science major:

- Helps fulfill the requirement for 10 PLSC courses for political science majors.
- Fulfills the requirement of at least 1 course in international relations
- Helps fulfill the requirement for 6 upper-level courses (300- or 400-level)

Learning Outcomes

In this course, students will learn about the relationship between economic and military power in a range of historical settings. They will also use and develop their writing and critical thinking skills.

Course Materials

This course will use a variety of text, video, and other sources. With the exception of three books that we will read in their entirety, all of the materials are available through Brightspace. Two of the three books are available as e-books through the library. The three books we will read are:

- Capella Zielinski, Rosella. 2016. *How States Pay for Wars.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press. [Note that this is available as an e-book through the library.]

- Gilpin, Robert. 1981. *War & Change in World Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- McDonald, Patrick J. 2009. *The Invisible Hand of Peace: Capitalism, the War Machine, and International Relations Theory*. New York: Cambridge University Press. [Note that this is available as an e-book through the library.]

Course Requirements and Grading

Class Discussion. Over the course of the semester, there are 11 scheduled discussions of assigned readings. The dates and topics of these discussions are noted in bold print in the course schedule below. Three are linked to books we are reading. Eight are tied to other course materials. Each will begin with a question (or questions) posted in the online discussion board in Brightspace, setting the stage for an in-person class discussion. Tentative versions of the discussion questions are included in this syllabus but are subject to change as the semester goes along. The discussion board will present the final version of each question. *You should post an answer by 5:00pm on the day before each scheduled class discussion.* This will give me time to read them before our class meeting the next morning. Late answers will not receive credit. I may ask you to talk about your answer in class. After you post your answer, you will be able to see other students' posts and respond to them online if you like, though you are not required to do so. You must be present in class during on the day of the discussion in order to receive credit for it, even if you posted an answer online. I will not accept excuses for an absence but each student may miss two scheduled discussions without penalty. The remaining discussion posts will count for 35% of your grade for the course.

Midterm Exam. There will be a midterm exam on October 10th that will cover all the lectures and course material assigned though that date. The exam will consist of short-answer questions. To give you a better idea of what to expect, I will distribute a sample version of the exam roughly a week before the midterm. The midterm exam will count for 25% of your grade for the course.

Final Exam. The final exam be given on the date determined by the university during the final exam period. We should know this date soon, but it is set after classes have begun. The final exam will follow the same format as the midterm exam, but will cover all the lectures and course materials for the entire class. The final exam will count for 40% of your grade for the course.

Grading Scale. Your semester grade will be computed on a 100-point scale as follows: 94-100 = A; 91-93 = A-; 88-90 = B+; 84-87 = B; 81-83 = B-; 78-80 = C+; 74-77 = C; 71-73 = C-; 65-70 = D; 0-64 = F.

Other Course Policies

Class Attendance. I will take attendance on days when we have a scheduled class discussion. You must be present to get credit for the discussion, even if you posted an answer online. I will not accept medical or other excuses because I have no way to evaluate them. Instead, all students may miss two discussions without penalty.

Office Hours. I will be available from 10:00-11:30 on Tuesdays and Thursdays in my office, LNG-58. You do not need to make an appointment to see me during this time. If you need to meet at another time, either in person or via Zoom, contact me by e-mail and we will set it up. I will not hold office hours on days that the class does not meet.

Technology. We will use Brightspace, the university's learning management system, for some purposes, including the distribution of course materials, the submission of discussion posts, and reporting grades. Please note that I will not be using Brightspace to compute your semester grade, only to report grades. If you encounter technical problems with the system, I encourage you to turn to the technical support it provides: https://community.brightspace.com/support/s/contactsupport.

E-mail. I will use your university e-mail address for course announcements and other official purposes. Check this account at least once a day. I recommend setting your university e-mail account to forward messages to whatever e-mail address you use most often. I will respond to student messages in a timely manner but do not count on receiving an answer in less than 24 hours.

Grade Appeals. All grade appeals must be made in writing, not in person. If you believe a grade I assigned you is incorrect, you should write a brief email message explaining your concerns. I will review your message and respond to you in writing.

Cheating and Plagiarism. All writing submitted as part of this course, including comments posted on discussion boards, must be your own work, not something produced by other people or AI tools. You may introduce and use outside material that you think is relevant but you should credit the original authors when you do so. You need not do so through a formal citation system in a discussion board post, but you should say where you originally discovered the ideas you are using. On exams, you may not use notes or receive external assistance of any kind. All electronic devices must be completely turned off and put away during the exam unless you have received special permission to use them. Violations of these rules will result in a failing grade for the course and will be submitted to the Harpur College Academic Honesty Committee for further disciplinary action.

Decorum. I encourage you to express your views on the course material both in class and on the discussion boards. You are free to disagree with me or with your fellow students, just as others are free to disagree with you. In doing so, however, please refrain from personal insults or inflammatory rhetoric. Be respectful of one another and always remember that there is a real person on the other end of your comments.

Course Schedule and Assigned Materials

The course is divided into three thematic units, each several weeks long. The readings listed here will be posted on Brightspace.

August 20: Introduction and course overview

August 22: What is political economy?

Unit 1. Defining National Interests and Building Military Power

August 27: The economic and political foundations of military power

Harrison, Mark. 1998. "The economics of World War II: an overview." In Mark Harrison, ed., *The Economics of World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press). 1-42.

Discussion question for August 27: Did the superior economic capacity of the Allied powers make their victory in World War II inevitable?

August 29: Realist views of national interests

Jervis, Robert. 1979. "Systems Theory and Diplomatic History." In *Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory, and Policy*, edited by Paul Gordon Lauren. New York: Free Press. 212-44.

September 3: The political economy of national interests

Narizny, Kevin. 2003. "Both Guns and Butter, or Neither: Class Interests in the Political Economy of Rearmament." *American Political Science Review* 97(2): 203-20.

Discussion question for September 3: Consider how Narizny's argument about how states respond to international threats might apply to the United States' response to the growth of Chinese power today. What does his theory predict that the United States will do? Do you think this prediction will turn out to be correct?

September 5: Military spending and mobilization

Gholz, Eugene, and Harvey N. Sapolsky. 2021. "The Many Lines of Defense: The Political Economy of US Defense Acquisition." *Journal of Global Security Studies* 6(1): 1-10.

September 10: The political economy of military spending

Fordham, Benjamin O. 2007. "The Evolution of Republican and Democratic Positions on Cold War Military Spending: A Historical Puzzle." *Social Science History* 31(4): 603-35.

Discussion question for September 10: My article on why Democrats and Republicans switched their positions on military spending proposes several possible explanations but does not give a definitive answer to the question. What explanation do you think is best? Are there others not discussed in the article that are worth considering?

September 12: Mobilizing labor for military purposes

September 17: The political economy of war-fighting

Ransom, Roger L. 1989. *Conflict and Compromise*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 6.

Discussion question for September 17: In his chapter on slavery and the Civil War, Roger Ransom points to several ways in which the institution of slavery impeded the South's war effort. Are there social institutions that have had similar effects in other historical cases?

September 19: War and the development of the state
Scheve, Kenneth, and David Stasavage. 2010. "The Conscription of Wealth: Mass Warfare and the Demand for Progressive Taxation." *International Organization* 64(4): 529-61.

September 24: Civil wars

September 26: Book Discussion
Cappella Zielinski, Rosella . 2016. *How States Pay for Wars.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Discussion questions for September 26 -- please answer two:
1. Are indirect means of war finance really less visible to the public, and thus more politically acceptable? If so, why would states ever resort to direct means?

2. Can you envision a state ending a war because of the difficulty of financing it? What are some last-ditch means of paying for the war effort?

3. Since 1950, lending, especially international lending, has become more important as a means of financing war. What are the political implications of this development?

4. Are the political and economic drivers of war mobilization and strategy overrated? Some argue that the demands of the international system will dominate instead.

October 1: Catch-Up Day

October 3: No class meeting (University holiday)

October 8: No class meeting (Friday classes meet instead)

October 10: Mid-term exam

Unit 2. Economic Dimensions of Interstate Conflict and Coercion

October 17: Economic concerns and wartime strategy
PBS documentary, The Prize, part 4, "War and Oil,"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=407_uE-Vokc

Discussion question for October 17: The video on war and oil shows how one type of economic interdependence shaped Axis war goals in during World War II. Are there other important ways in which economic interdependence might shape war goals?

October 19: Fighting non-state actors

October 22: Interdependence and war mobilization
Morrow, James D. 1993. " Arms Versus Allies: Trade-Offs in the Search for Security." *International Security* 47(2): 207-33.

October 24: Arms races and arms control

October 29: Interdependence and influence

Hirschman, Albert O. 1980 [1945]. *National Power and the Structure of Foreign Trade*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. 3-52.

October 31: Economic Interdependence as a Cause of Peace

McDonald, Patrick. 2008. *The Invisible Hand of Peace*. New York Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1-3.

November 5: Economic Interdependence as a Cause of War

Young, Patricia T., and Jack S. Levy. 2010. "Domestic politics and the escalation of commercial rivalry: Explaining the War of Jenkins' Ear, 1739–48." *European Journal of International Relations* 17(2): 209-32.

Discussion question for November 5: Young and Levy discuss several pathways through which a commercial rivalry could lead to war, as it did between Britain and Spain in the 18th Century. Could any of these causal pathways lead to military conflict over commercial rivalry today?

November 7: No class meeting (Attending annual meeting of Peace Science Society)

November 12: Book discussion

McDonald, Patrick. 2008. *The Invisible Hand of Peace*. New York Cambridge University Press.

Discussion questions for November 12 -- please answer two of them:

1. Which of the possible mechanisms linking international trade to peace is most important?

2. McDonald argues that extensive public property is a threat to peace. Are there circumstances under which private property might pose a similar threat?

3. McDonald argues that political factions seeking to limit international trade will pursue a more aggressive foreign policy. Does his argument apply to protectionist political factions in the present-day United States?

4. The last two presidential administrations have placed greater limits on international trade, especially with China. Do these moves make military conflict more likely?

Unit 3. Shaping the International System

November 14: Geography and world power

November 19: Economics, Empire, and Grand Strategy

Frieden, Jeffry A. 1994. "International Investment and Colonial Control: A New Interpretation." *International Organization* 48(4): 559-93.

Discussion question for November 19: Could the economic motives for imperialism set out in the Frieden article be used to explain other foreign policy choices by powerful states?

November 21: Hegemony and Order

Krasner, Stephen D. 1976. "State Power and the Structure of International Trade." *World Politics* 28(3): 317-47.

Discussion question for November 21: Stephen Krasner wrote "State Power and the Structure of International Trade" nearly 50 years ago. Has United States foreign policy developed as the theory set out in his article anticipated?

November 26: No class meeting (Friday classes meet instead)

November 28: No class meeting (University holiday)

December 3: Hegemonic Transition and Conflict

Rapkin, David, and William R. Thompson. 2003. "Power Transition, Challenge, and the (Re)emergence of China." *International Interactions* 29: 315-42.

December 5: Book discussion

Gilpin, Robert. 1981. *War & Change in World Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Discussion questions for December 5 -- please answer two:

1. What benefits does the dominant state in the international system get from hegemony?

2. What are the most important sources of change in the structure of the system?

3. In chapter 4 of *War & Change in World Politics*, Robert Gilpin gives several reasons why the costs of maintaining the status quo rise more rapidly than the system leader's economic capacity to support it. At least some of these arguably apply to the contemporary United States. Which do you think is most important?

4. What does Gilpin's book suggest about the likelihood of a war between the United States and China?

5. Gilpin's book was published more than 40 years ago. Are there things about it that are dated?