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Major Issues in International Politics: Politics Without a Centre and Its Consequences

The aim of this course is to explore the ways on which global processes and structures are changing domestic and international politics. The focus of the course will be on the tension between traditional notions of security, which focus on geopolitics and the state, and wider views of security that involve a wider range of actors and policy areas. The central questions that we will address will focus on understanding how the nature of political power and its organization is being changed and is responding to pressures that come from beyond the state. We want to explore the argument that the international system and states are being shaped by the erosion of the central pillars that have defined the modern state and period: a sovereign political centre, a central political identity and a central leadership in the international order. This “politics without a centre” has also been called the new medievalism.

We will deal with a range of issues – from the environment and food to pandemics -in an attempt to explore the ways in which states respond to and are changed by global challenges. The ultimate aim of this course is to assess whether the traditional conceptual tools we have in international relations can help us understand the growing uncertainty and complexity of international politics.

Our approach will focus on questions that regard managing resources and their consequences as a way of understanding how actors in the international system try to define their interests and what instruments they might use to pursue them. We will do this by structuring our discussion around some broad concepts – namely, security, sovereignty and conflict – that have been central to the international system throughout the modern period.

Bibliography

While there is no set textbook for the course, students may find the books listed below helpful.

Mark Beeson and Nick Bisley, eds. **Issues in 21st Century World Politics. 3rd Ed.** London: Palgrave, 2017.

Donald M. Snow. **Cases in International Relations.** Sixth Edition. London: Longman, 2018.

Note that additional material will be added to the course website in the form of newspaper or journal articles, think tank reports or government documents. These will help you understand the topics and prepare for the exam.

Assessment

Assessment will be based on a two-hour written exam. A detailed understanding of the readings is essential and issues raised for discussion in lectures will also be useful. Students can choose to

write a short paper of 3000 words for the course. In this case, the paper will be worth 50% of the final grade and the written exam the remaining 50%. Exam questions will be in English but written answers can be in English or Italian.

Course Outline

1. Introduction – International Relations Theories and the International System

We will open the course by looking at some of the basic questions that have always been at the heart of international relations. We will discuss how some basic theories have tried to make sense of international relations and how they might provide useful maps to navigate around some of the challenges we face and will address in the course.

Readings:

Donald M. Snow. *Cases in International Relations*. Chapter 1 and 2.

Mark Beeson and Nick Bisley, eds. *Issues in 21st Century World Politics*. Chapter 3.

2. What Kind of World Do We Live In?

This week's discussion will provide a very brief historical context and then ask what kind of order do we have in the international system today. The Cold War Period brought stability in its own way and was replaced by optimism that a new kind of multilateral and rules-based order. Nearly three decades later, we are unsure of what kind of order and system we have, with consequences for how we address some of the questions we will discuss in the rest of the course.

Readings:

Graham Allison. 2018. "The Myth of the Liberal Order: From Historical Accident to Conventional Wisdom." *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2018).

Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry. "Liberal World: The Resilient Order." *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2018).

Stephen Kotkin. "Realist World: The Players Change, but the Game Remains." *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2018).

3. Energy Security

Guaranteeing access to reliable and affordable forms of energy has been central to modern societies for centuries but has taken on a greater sense of urgency in a highly interdependent and competitive global economy. Our discussion will examine what we mean by energy security and what consequences it may have for international politics.

Readings:

Cherp, Aleh, and Jessica Jewell. "The concept of energy security: Beyond the four As." *Energy Policy* 75 (2014): 415-421.

Goldthau, Andreas. *Handbook of Global Energy Policy*. Wiley., 2013. Chapters 2-4.

4. Energy Security, Sovereignty and Conflict

As a scarce resource, energy is often seen as a zero-sum game in international relations and thus more likely to lead to conflict than cooperation. However, the relationship between energy producing and primarily energy consuming states is a complex one, with producers not always being in a position to dictate terms. This shifts the focus to the question of the capacity of states to shape decisions about their energy future, which may not just be about security of supply. In

this week's discussion, we will explore the complex relationships that develop around energy and their potential for cooperation and conflict in international relations.

Readings:

Goldthau, Andreas. **Handbook of Global Energy Policy**. Wiley., 2013. Chapters 10-12.
Goldthau, A., & Sitter, N. (2020). Power, authority and security: the EU's Russian gas dilemma.
Journal of European Integration, 42(1), 111-127.

5. Environmental Security

Climate change is only one of a series of environmental issues that have become an important issue in international relations. States are beginning to acknowledge that they have to address these issues to provide long-term stability and possibly their own survival. In this week's discussion, we explore the issue of environmental security and how it is understood and interpreted by different actors in the international system.

Readings:

Peter Dauvergne, ed. *Handbook of Global Environmental Politics*. Edward Elgar, 2005. Chapters 3-4.
Paul G. Harris. *Routledge Handbook of Global Environmental Politics*. Routledge, 2014. Chapters 7 and 19.

6. Environmental Security, Sovereignty and Conflict

Environmental issues present one of the clearest challenges to an international system dominated by sovereign national states. Many issues do not recognise national borders, requiring broad-based and multilateral solutions. At the same time, environmental issues may have differentiated consequences and, thus, reinforce national differences. In this week's discussion, we will explore the tension between the needs of environmental security and the challenges these may raise for sovereignty.

Readings:

Beardsworth, R. (2020). Climate science, the politics of climate change and futures of IR.
International Relations, 0047117820946365.
Bernstein, S. (2020). The absence of great power responsibility in global environmental politics.
European Journal of International Relations, 26(1), 8-32.
Mark Beeson and Nick Bisley, eds. ***Issues in 21st Century World Politics***. Chapter 10.

7. Water Security and Conflict

Water provides a useful lens to understand many of the challenges of the contemporary international system. It is a scarce resource with very few alternatives to replace it. It is often a trans-border resource used for different purposes within and across states. It is, thus, a classic zero-sum issue that requires collaboration and cooperation for stability in the international system. In this week's discussion, we will look at cases of water as the source of both conflict and cooperation.

Readings:

Bruce Lankford, Karen Bakker, et al., ed. *Water Security: Principles, Perspectives and Practices*.
Routledge, 2013. Chapters 4 and 17.
Donald M. Snow. ***Cases in International Relations***. Chapter 13.

World Water Council, ed. **Global Water Security: Lessons Learnt and Long-Term Implications**. Routledge, 2018. Choose at least one case study from one chapter.

8. Food Security

Food politics have always been an integral part of international relations. They were at the heart of Europe's colonialism as well as international trade. In this week's discussion, we will examine how states and other actors pursue food security in the global economy and its consequences at all levels, from the local to the global.

Readings:

Paarlberg, Robert. **Food Politics: What Everyone Needs to Know**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Chapters 1, 3-4 and 14.

9. Food security, sovereignty and conflict

The dynamics of the global economy have raised new issues in food politics, leading to a discussion about a possible tension between food security and food sovereignty. In this week's discussion, we will look at how this dynamic plays out in issues such as land leasing and land grabs, examining what this means for relations between different kinds of global actors.

Readings:

William Schanbacher. **The Politics of Food: The Global Conflict Between Food Security and Food Sovereignty**. Chapter 1 & 3.

Daniele Conversi. Sovereignty in a Changing World: From Westphalia to Food Sovereignty," **Globalizations**, (2016), Vol. 13, No. 4, 484–498.

10. Information, Cyber-security and Soft Power

In this discussion, we will look at how technology is changing the nature of political relations, power and even how we understand security.

READINGS:

Joseph Nye. "China's Soft and Sharp Power." **Project Syndicate** Jan 4, 2018.

Harriet Moynihan, "The Application of International Law to State Cyberattacks Sovereignty and Non-intervention" Chatham House Paper, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, ISBN ISBN 978 1 78413 378 8, December 2019.

11. Pandemics and Security

It has already become apparent that the Covid-19 pandemic is changing society, the economy and politics throughout the globe. It may be too early to assess the extent of those changes and whether they will last but public health has always been a transborder issue but especially so in recent decades. In our discussion, we will look more generally at the question of global public health and how it may clash with traditional concepts of sovereignty.

Readings:

Thomas J. Bollyky and Chad P. Bown. The Tragedy of Vaccine Nationalism: Only Cooperation Can End the Pandemic. **Foreign Affairs**. July 2020.

Nikolas Gvosdev. Why the Pandemic Has Revived Hard-Nosed Realism. **World Politics Review**. September 2020.

Davies, S. E. (2008). Securitizing infectious disease. **International Affairs**, 84(2), 295-313.

12. Consequences of Global Challenges: Migration

Migration is a complex phenomenon driven by a range of factors. There is no question, however, that the international system's capacity to respond to some of the global challenges we have examined has consequences for whether people feel the need to seek security elsewhere. This week's discussion will take a very brief look at migration, looking at how different states have tried to address the question and some possible consequences for international relations.

Readings:

Donald M. Snow. *Cases in International Relations*. Chapter 11.

Mark Beeson and Nick Bisley, eds. *Issues in 21st Century World Politics*. Chapter 14.

Anna Knoll, Francesco Rampa, et al. **The nexus between food and nutrition security, and migration: Clarifying the debate and charting a way forward**. (Discussion Paper 212). Maastricht: ECDPM. <http://ecdpm.org/publications/nexus-between-food-nutrition-security-and-migration/>.

13. Consequences of Global Challenges: Populism

The end of the Cold war not only did not bring about the stable, rules-based international order that many liberal proponents forecast, it has also transformed domestic politics with consequences for international order. Brexit, Trump, Putin are just a few examples of changes in domestic preferences that can have consequences for international order. In this week's discussion, we will examine how some of the global challenges that we have discussed contribute to an undermining of liberal democratic principles and the international order they seek to create.

Readings:

Mark Beeson and Nick Bisley, eds. *Issues in 21st Century World Politics*. Chapter 9 and 16.

Amy Chua. "Tribal World: Group Identity Is All." *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2018).

14. Consequences of Global Challenges: Changing Balance of Power

The issues we have discussed bring into relief not only the tensions between the need to find trans-national solutions and the pursuit of national interests but also how the possible changing balance of power in the international system may be contributing to and/or reflecting a changing balance of power away from the North Atlantic axis that has dominated international order for the last 500 years. Our discussion will examine how the possible transformation may provide opportunities to address global challenges and/or contribute to them.

Readings:

Donald M. Snow. *Cases in International Relations*. Chapter 3.

Mark Beeson and Nick Bisley, eds. *Issues in 21st Century World Politics*. Chapter 2.

15. Conclusion: Governance, Instability and Power

We will end the course by looking at how order might be established in the face of the global challenges we have examined. The tension is between their transnational nature and an international system based on sovereign states. The search for a solution lies between choosing multilateral forms of global governance and the return to the great game of power politics. We explore these options and try to assess what the prospects might be both in terms of addressing some of the global challenges that we face as well as whether order and stability will characterise the next period for the international system.

Readings:

Donald M. Snow. *Cases in International Relations*. Chapter 3.

Mark Beeson and Nick Bisley, eds. *Issues in 21st Century World Politics*. Chapter 5 and 6.