POL 4891
The Politics of Nuclear Weapons

Spring 2020
Time: Tuesday and Thursday, 1.00–2.15pm
Room: Anderson Hall 330 (West Bank)

Instructor: Mark S. Bell
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Syllabus version: March 19, 2020

COURSE DESCRIPTION

How do nuclear weapons affect international politics? How likely is nuclear war or nuclear terrorism? How dangerous is nuclear proliferation? Is nuclear disarmament possible? Is it desirable? This course examines these questions.

The course is organized loosely into three sections. In the first section, students are introduced to the major theories used to understand nuclear weapons. They will be exposed to the technological underpinnings of nuclear materials, nuclear weapons, and their effects; the classic theory of the nuclear revolution and more recent criticisms of it; deterrence theory; theories of escalation and nuclear strategy; and theories of why and how countries seek nuclear weapons. The goal of this section is to give students the technical and conceptual tools needed to understand nuclear weapons and the way they have affected international politics.

The second section introduces students to the history of the nuclear age. Major historical episodes and the political, strategic, and ethical debates surrounding them will be discussed. For example, the course will cover the Manhattan Project and bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; the evolution of nuclear strategy and the arms race between the Soviet Union and the United States; the proliferation of nuclear weapons to regional powers and the development of the global non-proliferation regime; nuclear crises including the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Suez Crisis, and Able Archer; and the history of arms control and detente. The goal of this section of the course is to give students a solid empirical understanding of the nuclear age that will enable them to evaluate, use, and understand the limitations of the theories and concepts introduced in the first third of the course.
The third section considers a range of contemporary issues, including nuclear terrorism; the role nuclear energy will (and should) play in the future, the feasibility of nuclear disarmament; the role of nuclear weapons in future US-China relations; the role of nuclear weapons in South Asia; the Iran nuclear deal and potential future proliferation; and the ways in which current and future technological developments may impact nuclear issues. In this section of the course, we will use understanding of both history and theory to evaluate the importance and impact of these ongoing and future challenges.

Although the class is separated into these sections, this distinction is somewhat artificial. In examining the theories, we will discuss whether historical events seem to validate or disconfirm those theories. When we discuss historical events we will ask which theories seem to explain these events best. And when analyzing current policy issues we will ask what effects the different theories suggest that these technological developments will have.

COURSE PREREQUISITES

There are no formal prerequisites for the class, but students who have taken a previous class on international politics (for example, POL 1025: Global Politics, POL 1026: U.S. Foreign Policy, POL 3835: International Relations, POL 3810: International Law, or POL 4885: International Conflict and Security) will likely get the most out of the class. If you don’t have any background of this sort, it would be advisable to speak with the TA or instructor before committing to take the class.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Participation. Passive learning does not work. You will need to come to class having done the reading, ready to engage with the material, and prepared to share your thoughts. All students are expected to complete all the assigned readings before the class meetings, attend class, and participate. Participation will not only include attending and contributing in class, but also submitting short responses to the readings online in advance of classes. You will be expected to submit at least one response every week during the semester (except the weeks in which the midterms or policy memo occurs). There will also be unannounced in-class writing assignments that will count towards your participation grade. Expectations for the content of the responses will be discussed at the first class meeting. 25% of your grade will be based on participation.

Midterm. There will be an in-class midterm exam on March 17 which will combine short ID questions with longer essay questions. More details will be provided nearer the time of the exam. The midterm will count for 25% of your final grade.

Policy Memo. Writing a concise memo under time constraints is an incredibly important skill in a wide range of careers. Two thirds of the way through the semester, you will be given one week to write a short policy memo to a US policymaker about a policy issue connected to the class. Expectations for the memo will be discussed at the first class meeting, and the class when the topic of the memo is revealed will include information on how to write an effective memo. The memo topic will be revealed on March 26, and will be due on April 9. 25% of your grade will be based on the memo.
Final Assignment. There will be a final assignment in place of a final exam. More details will be provided nearer the time, but the assignment will be provided at the end of class on April 28 and due on Friday May 8. The final assignment will count for 25% of your grade.

REQUIRED TEXTS

There are no required books for the class.

COURSE POLICIES

There will be no laptops in class. This is not because I’m a luddite, in fact exactly the opposite—it’s because of science. Research shows that students take better notes by hand, learn more if they don’t have their laptops open, and that using laptops negatively affects the learning outcomes of those sitting around you. If you have your laptop open, you will be considerably more likely to receive a question out of the blue from the instructor. If you have a medical or other legitimate need for a laptop in class, please let the instructor or TA know.
COURSE SCHEDULE

All course readings are available on the course Canvas website (log in with your UMN ID and password to view the page).

PART I: Theories of Nuclear Weapons

Class 1, January 21. Introduction and Overview of IR Theory


Class 2, January 23. The Technology of Nuclear Weapons

- Matthew Bunn, How Nuclear Bombs Work, Part 1/2 (YouTube video, focus on part up to 48:23).
- Use the online NukeMap tool to get a sense for the effects of nuclear weapons [here](#).

Class 3, January 28. The Theory of the Nuclear Revolution


Class 5, February 4. Criticisms of the Theory of the Nuclear Revolution

- Brendan Rittenhouse Green, The Revolution That Failed (Cambridge University Press, 2020), chapter 2
Class 6, February 6. Norms and Taboos


- Carol Cohn, “The Perils of Mixing Masculinity and Missiles,” *New York Times*, Jan 5, 2018

Class 7, February 11. Bureaucratic and Organizational Politics


Class 8, February 13. Theories of Proliferation


PART II: THE NUCLEAR AGE

Class 9, February 18. Oppenheimer, the Manhattan Project, and the German Bomb

Project I (guest lecture by Michel Janssen)

- Readings are for both this and the following class


  - David C. Cassidy, *Farm Hall and the German Atomic Project of World War II: A Dramatic History*, 41–88.

Class 10, February 20. Oppenheimer, the Manhattan Project, and the German Bomb

Project II (guest lecture by Michel Janssen)

- Readings as above

Class 11, February 25. Hiroshima and Nagasaki


• Note: During class, we will watch the short film “Hiroshima/Nagasaki August 1945,” which contains harrowing footage of the effects of nuclear weapons. If you have any concerns about this, please contact the instructor or TA so that arrangements can be made.

Class 12, February 27. Cold War Nuclear Crises


Class 13, March 3. The NPT and Arms Control

• “Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons”


Class 14, March 5. Midterm Review

• No readings, come with questions!

March 10 & March 12. No Class: Spring Break

Class 15, March 17. Class canceled

• No readings

Class 16, March 19. The Late Cold War


Class 17, March 24. U.S. Nuclear Strategy


**Class 18, March 26. U.S. Nonproliferation Policy and Counterproliferation.**


**Class 19, March 31. SHORT PAPER ASSIGNMENT DUE, POLICY MEMO TOPIC PROVIDED.**

- No readings. Short class to discuss the policy memo assignment.

**Class 20, April 2. No Class: Work on your memos**

- No readings

**PART III: CONTEMPORARY ISSUES**

**Class 21, April 7. Nuclear Energy and Proliferation**


**Class 22, April 9. Nuclear Terrorism and Accidents.**


Class 24, April 16. Iran. POLICY MEMO DUE

- Indira Lanshmanan, “‘If you can’t do this deal...go back to Tehran’: The Inside Story of the Obama Administration’s Iran Diplomacy,” Politico EU, 26 September 2015.

Class 25, April 21. North Korea


Class 26, April 23. Nuclear Weapons and U.S.-China Relations


Class 27, April 28. Nuclear Weapons and Cyber. FINAL ASSIGNMENT PROVIDED


Class 28, April 30. Nuclear Disarmament


STANDARD STATEMENT ON COURSE REQUIREMENTS
POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT

Student Conduct Code:
The University seeks an environment that promotes academic achievement and integrity, that is protective of free inquiry, and that serves the educational mission of the University. Similarly, the University seeks a community that is free from violence, threats, and intimidation; that is respectful of the rights, opportunities, and welfare of students, faculty, staff, and guests of the University; and that does not threaten the physical or mental health or safety of members of the University community.

As a student at the University you are expected adhere to Board of Regents Policy: Student Conduct Code. To review the Student Conduct Code, please see here.

Note that the conduct code specifically addresses disruptive classroom conduct, which means “engaging in behavior that substantially or repeatedly interrupts either the instructor’s ability to teach or student learning. The classroom extends to any setting where a student is engaged in work toward academic credit or satisfaction of program-based requirements or related activities.”

Use of Personal Electronic Devices in the Classroom:
The University establishes the right of each faculty member to determine if and how personal electronic devices are allowed to be used in the classroom. For complete information, please see here.

Scholastic Dishonesty:
You are expected to do your own academic work and cite sources as necessary. Failing to do so is scholastic dishonesty. Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering, forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis. If it is determined that a student has cheated, he or she may be given an “F” or an “N” for the course, and may face additional sanctions from the University. For additional information, please see here.

The Office for Student Conduct and Academic Integrity has compiled a useful list of Frequently Asked Questions pertaining to scholastic dishonesty here. If you have additional questions, please clarify with your instructor for the course.

Makeup Work for Legitimate Absences:
Students will not be penalized for absence during the semester due to unavoidable or legitimate circumstances. For further details, please see here.

Appropriate Student Use of Class Notes and Course Materials:
Taking notes is a means of recording information but more importantly of personally absorbing and integrating the educational experience. However, broadly disseminating class notes beyond the classroom community or accepting compensation for taking and distributing classroom notes undermines instructor
interests in their intellectual work product while not substantially furthering instructor and student inter-
ests in effective learning. Such actions violate shared norms and standards of the academic community.
For additional information, please see [here](#).

**Grading and Transcripts:**
The University utilizes plus and minus grading on a 4.000 cumulative grade point scale. The two grading
systems used are the ABCDF and S-N. Political science majors and minors must take POL courses on the
ABCDF system. An S grade is the equivalent of a C- or better. Inquiries regarding grade changes should
be directed to the course instructor. Extra work in an attempt to raise a grade can only be submitted with
the instructor’s approval. For additional information, please see [here](#).

**Incompletes:**
The instructor will specify the conditions, if any, under which an “Incomplete” will be assigned instead of
a grade. No student has an automatic right to an incomplete. The instructor may set dates and conditions
for makeup work.

Department of Political Science Policy: The instructor may set dates and conditions for makeup work
using a “Completion of Incomplete Work” contract form. All work must completed no later than one
calendar year after the official last day of the class.

**Sexual Harassment**
“Sexual harassment” means unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and/or other verbal
or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfer-
ing with an individual’s work or academic performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive
working or academic environment in any University activity or program. Such behavior is not acceptable
in the University setting. For additional information, please consult [Board of Regents Policy](#).

**Equity, Diversity, Equal Opportunity, and Affirmative Action:**
The University provides equal access to and opportunity in its programs and facilities, without regard to
race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status,
veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. For more information, please consult [Board of Regents Policy](#).

**Disability Accommodations:**
The University of Minnesota is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all
students. The Disability Resource Center is the campus office that collaborates with students who have
disabilities to provide and/or arrange reasonable accommodations. If you have, or think you may have,
a disability (e.g., mental health, attentional, learning, chronic health, sensory, or physical), please contact
DS at 612-626-1333 to arrange a confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accom-
modations.

If you are registered with DS and have a current letter requesting reasonable accommodations, please
contact your instructor as early in the semester as possible to discuss how the accommodations will be
applied in the course. For more information, please see the DS [website](#).
Mental Health and Stress Management:
As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance and may reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. University of Minnesota services are available to assist you. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the Student Mental Health[website].

Academic Freedom and Responsibility:
Academic freedom is a cornerstone of the University. Within the scope and content of the course as defined by the instructor, it includes the freedom to discuss relevant matters in the classroom. Along with this freedom comes responsibility. Students are encouraged to develop the capacity for critical judgment and to engage in a sustained and independent search for truth. Students are free to take reasoned exception to the views offered in any course of study and to reserve judgment about matters of opinion, but they are responsible for learning the content of any course of study for which they are enrolled.

Reports of concerns about academic freedom are taken seriously, and there are individuals and offices available for help. Contact the instructor, the Department Chair, your adviser, the associate dean of the college, or the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs in the Office of the Provost.

Students are responsible for class attendance and all course requirements, including deadlines and examinations. The instructor will specify if class attendance is required or counted in the grade for the class.