

Nuclear Politics

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Catalog Course Description

Examination of nuclear weapons in world politics: nuclear nonproliferation; deterrence and strategic stability; arms control and disarmament; decision-making in nuclear crises; contemporary nonproliferation challenges.

Prerequisites

[POLS 206](#), [POLS 209](#), and junior or senior classification or approval of department head.

Course Overview

Some of the most important global challenges over the last 75 years stem from nuclear weapons – the most destructive military technology ever invented. US Presidents from Harry S. Truman to Donald J. Trump have sought to use American nuclear forces to enhance the country’s security, while attempting to limit the spread of nuclear technology internationally. Observers sometimes paint nuclear weapons as relics of the Cold War, when the United States and the Soviet Union possessed massive nuclear arsenals aimed at one another’s territory. It is true that nuclear weapons were central to the Cold War. However, issues related to nuclear security remain critical even after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Significant international crises and events in recent memory can be traced back to nuclear weapons. This includes but is not limited to: the 1990-91 Persian Gulf War, the 1993-94 crisis with North Korea, Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests in 1998, the 2003 Iraq War, Israel’s surprise attack against Syria in 2007, Iran’s quest for nuclear technology and (possibly) a bomb, and the ongoing crisis over North Korea’s long-range missiles and nuclear forces. Understanding nuclear politics, therefore, remains critical.

In this course, students will learn about nuclear politics and participate in simulations of real-world diplomatic negotiations and crises. Working in groups, the students will represent key countries or other international actors in simulated international events including: (1) the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference; (2) a United Nations Security Council meeting; and (3) a nuclear crisis stemming from Iran’s potential development of a bomb.

We will begin the semester with a series of lectures to provide the students with the requisite theoretical and practical foundations, but they will spend the majority of the semester learning through hands-on experiences. The proposed course is innovative in the sense that it will facilitate learning objectives through student involvement in simulations, and not just professor-driven lectures. Many have argued – and some empirical evidence shows – that this kind of “active learning” approach effectively stimulates critical thinking, in part, by helping students apply seemingly abstract theories

and concepts to actual situations.

Student Learning Outcomes

The broad objectives of the class are to disseminate knowledge on a central issue in international security – the spread of nuclear weapons – and to facilitate interest in this important topic. More specifically, by the end of the course, students will:

- Identify and analyze the technical dimensions of nuclear proliferation, including how nuclear bombs are made.
- Describe why some countries build nuclear weapons but others do not.
- Explain why the spread of nuclear weapons is widely viewed as dangerous, and articulate the key debates about the political effects of nuclear proliferation.
- Analyze the policy tools that governments and international organizations have in place to limit the diffusion of nuclear weapons.
- Critically assess the most significant contemporary nuclear challenges, including (but not limited to) the crises in Iran and North Korea.
- Recall the nuclear policies of strategically important countries.
- Apply lessons from the class to real-world diplomacy.
- Identify the strengths and limitations of international organizations such as the United Nations.

Course Policies

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Disability Services at Student Services at White Creek, 701 West Campus Blvd, 1224 TAMU, or call 979-845-1637. For additional information visit <http://disability.tamu.edu>.

Diversity Statement:

The Department of Political Science supports the Texas A&M University commitment to diversity, and welcomes individuals from any racial, ethnic, religious, age, gender, sexual orientation, class, disability, and nationality. (See <http://diversity.tamu.edu/>). In the spirit of this vital commitment, in this course each voice in the classroom has something of value to contribute to all discussions. Everyone is expected to respect the different experiences, beliefs and values expressed by fellow students and the instructors, and to engage in reasoned discussion that refrains from derogatory comments about other people, cultures, groups, or viewpoints.

Technology Policy:

Students are welcome to use laptops/tablets for appropriate educational use, such as note taking, in class. Personal use of a computer device (checking email/social networking) is prohibited in class. All cell phones should be turned off or set to silent during class.

Title IX and Statement on Limits to Confidentiality:

Texas A&M University and the College of Liberal Arts are committed to fostering a learning environment that is safe and productive for all. University policies and federal and state laws provide guidance for achieving such an environment. Although class materials are generally considered confidential pursuant to student record policies and laws, University employees — including instructors — cannot maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues that jeopardize the health and safety of our community. As the instructor, I must report (per Texas A&M System Regulation 08.01.01) the following information to other University offices if you share it with me, even if you do not want the disclosed information to be shared:

Allegations of sexual assault, sexual discrimination, or sexual harassment when they involve TAMU students, faculty, or staff, or third parties visiting campus. These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who will want to talk with you about the incident that you have shared. In many cases, it will be your decision whether you wish to speak with that individual. If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting, you are encouraged to make an appointment with the Student Counseling Service (<https://scs.tamu.edu/>). Students and faculty can report non-emergency behavior that causes them to be concerned at <http://tellsomebody.tamu.edu>.

Academic Integrity

Any student who violates the Aggie Honor Code will face the harshest penalty possible. For additional information please visit: <http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu>. “An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal, or tolerate those who do.”

Attendance and Makeup Policies

If an absence is excused, the professor will allow the student to makeup any exams that are missed. The student is responsible for providing evidence to substantiate that the absence is, in fact, excused according to university policy. Falsification of documentation is a violation of the Aggie Honor Code. Further details are included in Student Rule 7 available here: <https://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07/>.

Meeting Outside of Scheduled Class Time: This course will require you to give briefings and participate in meetings outside of the normally scheduled class time. You will be able to schedule the time of these meetings based on your availability.

Readings

You will read from several books and articles throughout the semester. Some of the articles are available online or through the TAMU library. If this is not the case, I will provide the reading in eCampus.

News. Keeping-up with current events is important to succeeding in this class. Events affecting international relations that unfold during the semester may be covered on the midterm and final exams. Students are expected to read at least one newspaper daily. I recommend the New York Times (www.nytimes.com), but there are many suitable outlets that one may consult.

Course Grades

Students will take two exams and complete three 5-page papers during the course of the semester. They are expected to come to class prepared and participate actively in course discussions and simulations. Grades will be determined based on the following distribution:

Exam 1 (33%). This will be an in-class exam based on Part I of the course.

Exam 2 (33%). This exam will be based on the three simulations. It will be an in depth take-home exam that will be due on the day of the scheduled final exam for the course.

Simulations (11% each: $11\% * 3 = 33\%$). Your grade on the simulation will be based on the following:

--A 5-page (double spaced) paper will be completed *before* each simulation. There will be one paper per team. This will represent 4% of your final grade per simulation (12% total).

--Your physical presence in class. This will represent 4% of your final grade per simulation (12% total). I will calculate this score based on the following formula: $(\# \text{ of days you were present} / \text{total } \# \text{ of days}) * 100$. You will not be penalized for university-excused absences.

--The *quality* of your participation during the simulation, based on your prepared statements and ability to respond to questions. This will represent 3% of your final grade per simulation (9% total).

Surveys (1%). Each student will take a pre- and post-class survey. Simply completing the survey is sufficient to earn full credit.

Course Outline

Note: deviations from this course schedule may be necessary if unforeseen events arise.

1. Monday, January 14 – Introduction
2. Wednesday, January 16 – Building Blocks 1
Monday, January 21 – MLK holiday (no class)
3. Wednesday, January 23 – Building Blocks 2
4. Monday, January 28 – Building Blocks 3

5. Wednesday, January 30 – Building Blocks 4
 6. Monday, February 4 – Building Blocks 5
 7. Wednesday, February 6 – Building Blocks 6
 8. Monday, February 11 – Building Blocks 7
 9. Wednesday, February 13 – Building Blocks 8
 10. Monday, February 18 – Building Blocks 9
 11. Wednesday, February 20 – Building Blocks 10
 12. Monday, February 25 – Exam #1
 13. Wednesday, February 27 – Simulation #1
 14. Monday, March 4 – Simulation #1
 15. Wednesday, March 6 – Simulation #1
Spring Break: March 11-15 (no class)
 16. Monday, March 18 – Simulation #1
 17. Wednesday, March 20 – Simulation #1
 18. Monday, March 25 – Simulation #2
 19. Wednesday, March 27 – Simulation #2
 20. Monday, April 1 – Simulation #2
 21. Wednesday, April 3 – Simulation #2
 22. Monday, April 8 – Simulation #2
 23. Wednesday, April 10 – Simulation #3
 24. Monday, April 15 – Simulation #3
 25. Wednesday, April 17 – Simulation #3
 26. Monday, April 22 – Simulation #3
 27. Wednesday, April 24 – Simulation #3
 28. Monday, April 29 – Simulation #3
- Exam #2 due: May 6 at 12:30pm**

Detailed Course Schedule and Readings

Part I: Building Blocks

1. *Thinking about nuclear weapons.* (1 class)

Key questions:

- What are nuclear weapons?
- How do you build a bomb?
- What is nuclear proliferation?
- What is the connection between nuclear weapons and nuclear energy?
- What is nuclear latency?

Reading:

- Charles D. Ferguson, *Nuclear Energy: What Everyone Needs to Know* (2011), Chapters 1 and 4.

2. *Motives for the bomb.* (2 classes)

Key questions:

- Why do countries seek nuclear weapons?
- Why are others seemingly disinterested in the bomb?
- How does a country's security environment shape the nuclear proliferation process?
- What is the role of domestic politics in encouraging proliferation?
- Do people and individuals drive nuclear politics?

Readings:

- Scott D. Sagan, "Why Do Countries Build Nuclear Weapons: Three Models in Search of a Bomb," *International Security* (1996/97)
- Alexandre Debs and Nuno Monteiro, "Conflict and Cooperation on Nuclear Nonproliferation," *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 20:331-349 (May 2017).

3. *International interventions* (2 classes)

Key questions:

- What are the restraints countries seeking to build nuclear weapons might face?
- How can the United States stop other countries from obtaining the bomb?
- Do preventive attacks against nuclear programs work? What about other kinds of carrots and sticks?
- What is the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and how has it influenced the international spread of nuclear weapons?

Readings:

- Matthew Fuhrmann, "When Preventive War Threats Work for Nuclear Nonproliferation," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 41 (2018). Available at: <https://twq.elliott.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2121/f/downloads/41-3%20Fuhrmann.pdf>.
- Matthew Fuhrmann Yonatan Lupu, "Do Arms Control Treaties Work? Assessing the Effectiveness of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty," *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 60, Issue 3, 1 September 2016, Pages 530–539.

4. *Nuclear deterrence*. (2 classes)

Key questions:

- Do nuclear weapons bolster international peace and stability?
- Is war less (or more) likely because of nuclear weapons?
- What is mutually assured destruction and how does it work?
- What is nuclear brinkmanship?
- What are the assumptions on which nuclear deterrence theory rests?
- Can nuclear proliferation be destabilizing – even if deterrence works?

--What is the nuclear taboo and how does it affect deterrence?

Readings:

- Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), chapter 1.
- Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed* (New York: Norton, 2002), chapter 2.
- Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), chapter 3.
- Nina Tannenwald, "How Strong is the Nuclear Taboo Today?" *The Washington Quarterly* Vol. 41 (2018). Available at: <https://twq.elliott.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2121/f/downloads/41-3%20Tannenwald.pdf>.

5. *Coercive diplomacy*. (2 classes)

Key questions:

- What is the difference between deterrence and coercive diplomacy?
- Does nuclear coercion work?
- Why is nuclear coercion harder than deterrence?
- Does brinkmanship work in coercive diplomacy?
- In what historical cases has nuclear coercion worked? When has it failed?

Readings:

- Matthew Kroenig, *The Logic of American Nuclear Strategy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), chapter 1.
- Todd Sechser and Matthew Fuhrmann, *Nuclear Weapons and Coercive Diplomacy* (New York: Cambridge University Press), chapters 1 and 2.

6. *Nuclear strategy*. (1 class)

Key questions:

- For what purpose should nuclear weapons be used?
 - Deterring nuclear attacks only?
 - Deterring chemical or biological attacks, in addition to nuclear strikes?
 - Deterring conventional attacks?
 - Protecting allies, in addition to a country's own homeland?
 - Compelling other countries to change their foreign policies?
- How many nuclear weapons do you need?
- To what extent does nuclear superiority matter?
- How should nuclear weapons be delivered (bombers, submarines, or missiles)?
- Who should have command and launch authority over nuclear weapons?
- What are the implications of forward-deploying nuclear forces?

--What is a no first use (NFU) pledge?

Readings:

--Vipin Narang, "Posturing for Peace? Pakistan's Nuclear Postures and South Asian Stability," *International Security* Vol. 34, No. 3 (Winter 2009/10), pp. 38–78. Available at:

<https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/files/Narang.pdf>.

Exam #1 will take place after the last lecture on "building blocks."

Part II: Simulation #1 – Iran and the U.S. National Security Council (NSC)

Pre-Simulation Reading:

--David Rothkopf, *Running the World: The Inside Story of the NSC and the Architects of American Power* (2006), chapter 1.

--Paul Kerr, "Iran's Nuclear Program: Status," Congressional Research Service (2018). Available at: <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/RL34544.pdf>.

Simulation overview: It's July 15, 2019. It appears that Iran is attempting to increase its capacity to enrich uranium and US intelligence detects a previously-secret nuclear facility buried deep in a mountain. The president convenes the National Security Council to consider how to address the situation. In particular, he asks the NSC to consider whether he should order a military attack against Iran designed to degrade its nuclear infrastructure.

1. Background briefing (1 class)

Paper #1 due prior to the start of the simulation.

2. The simulation: A renewed Iranian nuclear crisis (4 classes)
 - a. Each member of the NSC (played by groups of students) gives a prepared statement to the president (played by Prof. Fuhrmann).
 - b. The NSC deliberates.
 - c. Each member of the NSC gives a final recommendation to the president.

Part III: Simulation #2 – UN Security Council

Pre-Simulation Reading:

--CFR, "UN Security Council," <http://www.cfr.org/international-organizations-and-alliances/un-security-council-unsc/p31649>.

--William C. Potter and Gaukhar Mukhatzhanova, eds., *Forecasting Nuclear Proliferation in the 21st Century: A Comparative Perspective* (2010), Chapter 7.

Simulation overview: It's August 20, 2019. Chinese intelligence produces a startling revelation: South Korea has a secret nuclear weapons program. It appears that Seoul

may be on the cusp of carrying out a surprise nuclear test. The UN Security Council meets to decide whether to pass a resolution condemning, and possibly sanctioning, South Korea.

1. Background briefing (1 class)

Paper #2 due prior to the start of the simulation.

2. The simulation: UN action against South Korea (4 classes).
 - a. The P-5 countries (US, UK, Russia, China, and France) give opening statements.
 - b. Deliberation continues.
 - c. The UNSC votes on a resolution.

Part IV: Simulation #4 – The NPT Review Conference

Pre-Simulation Reading:

--Read information on the 2015 NPT Review Conference here:

<http://www.un.org/en/conf/npt/2015/>.

--Make sure you have carefully read the full text of the NPT (available at the link above).

Simulation overview: It's April 18, 2020. Delegates from all 190-member nations convene in New York for the 5-year review conference of the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. The goal is to pass a resolution that outlines future nonproliferation goals.

1. Background briefing (1 class)

Paper #3 due prior to the start of the simulation.

2. Simulation: NPT review conference (5 classes)
 - a. Each country (played by a group of students) issues an opening statement.
 - b. Delegates deliberate.
 - c. Delegates negotiate and draft language for the resolution.
 - d. Delegates vote on the final resolution.