

Great Power Politics and the International Order: Theories and Applications

Course Outline

University of Warsaw, Summer Semester, 2022

Course Instructor

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Professor Rabel is a Professorial Fellow at the Centre for Strategic Studies, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. His short bio can be accessed at: <https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/strategic-studies/about/staff/fellows-and-associates/rob-rabel>

Short course prescription

This course analyses great power politics and the changing international order. After examining a range of theoretical approaches to how great powers create international order, it focuses on how the rise or re-emergence of other great powers is affecting the American-led international order in the 21st century. As well as offering students the opportunity to apply relevant International Relations theories, the course analyses the grand strategies of great powers and their implications for regional and global order.

Full course description

This course analyses great power politics and the changing international order from theoretical and applied perspectives. It begins by introducing students to the concept of 'great powers' and to a range of theoretical approaches about how they create international order, focusing especially on security order and institutional/normative order. The course also examines how theories of International Relations can be used to explain the roles played by specific powers, beginning with the United States as the world's most important great power since 1945 and then evaluating how the rise or re-emergence of other great powers (especially China) is affecting the American-led international order in the 21st century. As well as offering students the opportunity to apply relevant International Relations theories, the course analyses the grand strategies of great powers and their implications for regional and global order.

Course learning objectives

Students who pass this course will be able to:

1. Understand the concept of a great power
2. Assess theoretical and historical literature on the rise and fall of great powers
3. Explain how great powers create (or fail to create) international and regional order
4. Analyse the grand strategies of great powers, especially as they pertain to security and institutional/normative forms of international order
5. Critically evaluate arguments made by leading scholars in the field

- Enhance their research, writing and analytical skills by completing assignments on great power politics involving the application of both theoretical and policy-orientated perspectives

Assessment

You are required to submit two written assignments for this course. The first assignment is an exercise in critical analysis of selected course readings. The second assignment is a research essay that assesses your ability to apply theories to help explain some aspect of great power politics **or** a policy brief that addresses a strategic challenge facing one a specific great power.

Assessment

Assessment items and workload per item		%	Due date
1	Critical analysis of scholarly article (1,600-2,000 words)	30%	8 April 2022
2	Theory-based research essay OR strategic policy brief (3,000-3,500 words)	70%	16 May 2022

Assignment 1 – Critical Analysis Essay (2,000 words)

Choose **one** of the assigned readings from the 8 class sessions and write a short report analysing the core argument of the reading. These readings deal with conceptual, historical and theoretical issues.

The essay should cover the following items:

- A concise summary of the reading, and its main argument.
- What does the reading tell you about ‘order’ and ‘change’ in world politics?
- Is the argument convincing (why/why not)? (This may or may not involve a limited amount of research, drawing on other scholarly works.)
- A discussion of how this reading helps you understand (some aspect of) great power politics and of how effectively it applies a specific theoretical or methodological approach.

Assignment 2 – Option A: Research Essay (3,000-3,500 words)

If you select this option for the second assignment, you will need to write a substantive research paper that includes the application of theory to a specific topic. I will provide you with a list of questions and you are free to choose any **one** of these questions to work on.

Alternatively, you can set your own research question, but it needs to be approved by me first. **NOTE:** If you are interested in choosing your own research question then you must discuss this with me in the first three weeks of the class and the question must be approved by **1 April**. Here are the general guidelines for choosing your own research question:

- The topic has to be relevant to great power politics.
- It can focus on any one great power’s foreign policy in general **OR** a great power’s relationship with one or more great powers **OR** a great power’s relationship with a non-great power. (In the case of a great power’s relationship with a non-great power, you will need to specify why your research question matters for great power politics.)
- You may choose to write on contemporary or historical issues.
- Please note that you will **NOT** be allowed to set your own question after 1 April.

This assignment allows you to demonstrate your analytical skills and ability to conduct independent research on a relevant topic and apply theory effectively.

Assignment 2 –Option B: Policy/Strategy Paper (3,000-3,500 words)

If you select this option for the second assignment, you will need to write a strategically-focused policy brief.

The purpose of a policy brief is to assist policy-makers in reaching sound decisions on a specific policy issue. A policy brief summarises the key features of an issue, outlines policy options and provides recommendations on preferred options to address the issue. For the purposes of this course, I will be asking you to step into the shoes of those advising key foreign policy-makers and to prepare a policy brief that addresses a strategic challenge facing a great power in the contemporary era.

I will provide you with a list of topics and you are free to choose any **one** of these topics to work on. Alternatively, you can select a different issue to analyse but only with my prior approval.

The policy brief should be **3,000-3,500 words** in length (excluding bibliography and footnotes, which you should append). Your policy brief should begin with a brief executive summary, followed by analysis of the issue and ending with a set of recommendations. Sections and paragraphs should be numbered.

This assignment allows you to demonstrate your skills of succinct and effective policy writing, critical analysis and strategic thinking.

Marking Criteria

Each of your pieces of written work will be assessed on the basis of whether or not you have:

- a) Answered the question correctly;
- b) Developed clear and well-substantiated arguments;
- c) Linked your arguments together in a clear logic that flows through the assignment;
- d) Reflected an awareness in your writing of the literature on the subject;
- e) Written in a style that is easy to follow and communicates your point clearly and effectively;
- f) Observed relevant scholarly conventions.

Class Schedule

1. Course Introduction: ‘Great Powers’, Theory and the Modern International Order
2. Great Powers and International (Security) Order
3. Great Powers and International (Institutional/Normative) Order
4. The United States-led World Order
5. Making China Great Again
6. Asia’s Other Great Powers: India and Japan
7. Russia and Europe as (not so) Great Powers

8. The Emerging Order and its Indo-Pacific Fulchrum

NB: The full list of course readings will be made available in January 2022.