POSC 170 International Relations & World Politics

Spring 2000

Professor Robert B. Packer

Office: Dept. of Political Science, 413 Willis

Phone: 646-4119

e-mail: rpacker@carleton.edu

Change. The word itself has become a mantra for our time. Political and economic elites evoke it; social commentators embrace it; millions fear it.

World Politics, as we enter the 21st century, is about change. But it is also about continuity. How these polar opposites resolve their struggle for supremacy gives world politics its motive force.

Much will be said over the next nine weeks about the great transformation of the international system that has occurred since the collapse of the Soviet Bloc and the end of the Cold War. Much will also be said about the continuing problems of war and armament, poverty and economic development, that still afflict much of humanity.

At no time since the end of the last global war has the world experienced the breadth and depth of change that has occurred over the past nine years. To borrow the imagery of one scholar, it is as if the tectonic plates on which world politics had operated on in the past have suddenly shifted - yielding new valleys of concern through which to cross, and new mountains of opportunity on which to scale.

The international system structure, that two generations of political scientists had studied, was that of the bipolar world of the Cold War. The United States and the Soviet Union led two great alliances in mortal combat not only for power, but also for the hearts and minds of populations yearning for a better life.

With the edifice of the Communist monolith shattered, and its internal core rotted away, global citizens have been treated to talk of "the end of history" and a "new world order." But such talk of the halcyon days of a future Nirvana has proven premature at best.

Warfare currently engulfs more than forty countries in bloody conflict. Nationalism is resurgent, spawning a new breed of ethnic hatred. Followers and scholars of the Realist (Realpolitik) paradigm stress the continued primacy of power relations as the sine qua non of world politics. For them, lack of an organized international system structure - which the Cold War provided - yields chaos.

Opposed to the Realpolitik (a.k.a. Machtpolitik or "power politics") is the Liberal paradigm. Liberals hold the view that greater economic interdependence, political democratization, and technological advancement will lead to the promotion and preservation of peace.

Liberals stress the change in world politics, and wish more of it. Realists emphasize continuity and stability, and wish to manage the change that does occur.

As in any field of inquiry, proper analysis of ongoing phenomena requires a competent knowledge of the trends and events that have led us to this point in time. This course introduces students to the field of World Politics. Its ultimate concern is with understanding the dynamics of relations among and between state and non-state actors. To do this requires an understanding of those circumstances that constitute the basic structures of the international system, and that define the context in which politics take place.

This course attempts both to clarify competing perspectives on the dynamics and structures of the international system and also to investigate the changing roles played by various states, international institutions, and transnational actors. Major parts of the course detail, respectively: competing explanations of the sources of foreign policy decisions; current world issues; and basic future trends. The overall objective is to give students sufficient awareness of the interaction of political, technological, communications, economic, and military factors to permit a critical appreciation of the contemporary international environment and ways of thinking about the future.

COURSE OUTLINE

This course will be mostly lecture. However, I strongly encourage questions on any aspect of the readings or lecture that is unclear. A central objective of the course to build student skills in critical thinking, reasoning, and effective argument. I would like all students to bring to every class-session a short list (two or three items) of what he or she believes to be the major themes of the readings assigned for that day. Two or three students will be randomly selected to start class-sessions by
reading and commenting on their lists. I expect vigorous discussion of the arguments raised by authors in the course. To that end, outside-of-class discussion groups may be useful. I further encourage students to take advantage of office hours.

There is a fair amount of reading for this course. A useful approach to organizing the material is to classify reading selections according to major theoretical arguments. This approach ought to facilitate comparisons within and between particular topic areas. There will be five exams given for the course. These exams will consist of one essay question each. These are to be completed outside class and typewritten. Each essay should be five to six pages (space-and-a-half) long. The essay questions will be based upon the readings and

lecture. The examinations will be graded on your ability to demonstrate a comprehension of the reading material and to integrate it with the basic tenets of world politics. Exams must be handed in by 5PM on the due date. All late papers will be penalized one-third grade per day late (e.g., A- becomes a B+ after one day, a B after two days). The final (fifth) exam is due June 5.

Attendance is essential. More than three absences may result in a lowering of grade. Grading will be based upon the exams (90%) and class participation (10%).

COURSE SCHEDULE

March 29-31: Post-Cold War visions: the "End of History" or the "Coming Anarchy"?


Melvin, "Experiencing the agony of Sierra Leone," Atlanta Constitution (February 4, 1999)


PART 1: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES IN THE STUDY OF WORLD POLITICS

April 3: Rival Perspectives of World Politics


April 5: cont. First Exam handed out

April 7: cont.

Hughes, Continuity and Change in World Politics: Competing Perspectives (1997):

Hollis & Martin, Explaining & Understanding International Relations (1991):

Hughes, Continuity and Change in World Politics: Competing Perspectives (1997): 46-64.


International Realist and Neo-Realist Perspectives


Hughes, Continuity and Change in World Politics: Combating Perspectives (1997): 79-88.

April 10: cont.
April 14: cont.
April 17: cont.


April 12: Liberal and Neo-Liberal critiques of Realism First Exam due


The Communitarian Challenge to World Order


April 19: cont. Second Exam handed out


Barber, "McWorld Vs. Jihad," in

PART II: INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM AND STATE INTERACTION

April 21: The Levels of Analysis Problem in World Politics


April 24: Balance of Power vs. Collective Security


April 26: Explaining the Cold War Second Exam due


Rationality and Decision Making Models


April 28: cont.


May 3: Misperception and the Paradoxes of War


Lamb, "The Basic Question - Why Do Wars Begin?" How to Think about Arms Control and Disarmament (1988): 176-188.


May 5: cont. Third Exam handed out

Christensen & Snyder, "Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity," in Viotti & Kauppi, International

May 8: cont.

May 10: cont.


PART III: TRANSNATIONAL POLICY ISSUES

May 12: The Global Political Economy Third Exam Due


May 15: cont.


May 17: cont. Fourth Exam handed out


Krugman, "In Praise of Cheap Labor" (web.mit.edukrugman/wwwsmokey.html)

May 19: International Security Affairs: Arms Race and Nuclear Strategy


May 22: cont.


May 24: International Security Affairs: Post-Cold War threats Fourth Exam due


May 29-31: Perpetual Peace or Turbulence? ... in World Politics Fifth Exam handed out


Fifth Exam Due (June 5)