Introduction to International Relations

A syllabus by Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations
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Overview

We live in a global era, in which what happens thousands of miles away has the ability to affect our lives. This time, it is a coronavirus known as COVID-19, which originated in a Chinese city many had never heard of but has spread to all corners of the earth. Next time, it could be another infectious disease from somewhere else. Twenty years ago, it was a group of terrorists trained in Afghanistan and armed with box cutters who commandeered four airplanes and flew them into buildings and claimed nearly three thousand lives. Next time, it could be terrorists who use a truck bomb or gain access to a weapon of mass destruction. In 2016, hackers in a nondescript office building in Russia traveled virtually in cyberspace to manipulate America’s elections. Now they have burrowed into our political life. In recent years, severe hurricanes and large fires linked to climate change have ravaged parts of the earth; in the future we can anticipate even more serious natural disasters. In 2008, it was a global financial crisis caused by mortgage-backed securities in America, but one day it could be a financial contagion originating in Europe, Asia, or Africa. This is the new normal of the twenty-first century.

In this global era, it is critical that all citizens understand how the world works. This introduction to international relations course eschews most of the theory, which tends to be too abstract and divorced from the way the world actually operates. Instead, it focuses on history, regions of the world, globalization and global challenges, and world order to provide readers with the essential background and building blocks necessary to make sense of this complicated and interconnected world. In short, this course will make students more globally literate, which is a must in this global era, as what goes on outside a country matters enormously to what happens inside. Even if we want to ignore the world, it will not ignore us. The choice we face is how to respond. We are connected to this world in all sorts of ways. We need to better understand it, both its promise and its threats, in order to make informed choices, be it as students, citizens, voters, parents, employees, or investors.

Course Structure

The course consists of 28 classes or units, approximating a normal semester or trimester in which a class would meet two times per week. Classes can be expanded or combined to fit the available time. Each class or unit in the course includes readings to be done (as well as videos, documentaries, and interactives to be viewed and podcasts, speeches, and radio programs to be listened to) beforehand along with suggested study questions, which can also be used for classroom discussion or for essay/examination questions.

Student Learning Objectives

Upon the successful completion of this course, students will have a better grasp of how the world we live in came to be, how it works, and why it matters. In particular, they will be able to:

• Describe the historical evolution of the international system from 1648 to the present;
• Analyze the major issues and problems in each region of the world;
• Understand the principal global challenges of this era, including but not limited to climate change, global health, trade, cyberspace, proliferation, terrorism, and development;
• Evaluate the role global governance can play in addressing the major problems in the contemporary world;
• Discuss world order and describe factors that contribute to order and those that detract from order.

**Required Books**
This course is built around *The World: A Brief Introduction* (Penguin Press, 2020), with each of the book’s chapters comprising one class and one chapter several classes. The book (hardcover) can be purchased at stores or online from Amazon and other retailers. The list price is $28.00 but it is often available for under $20.00. The kindle version costs $14.99. The course includes additional required readings that supplement *The World*, but importantly students do not need to purchase any additional books. Instead, all of the additional readings are available online. Many of the articles are drawn from *Foreign Affairs*, the magazine of record for international affairs. Students can purchase a subscription to *Foreign Affairs* that gives them unlimited access to the magazine’s entire catalog for $24.95. Other articles are drawn from news sources that for the most part are not behind a paywall or allow users to read a handful of articles each month for free before requiring them to purchase a subscription.

**Section 1: The Essential History**

**Class 1: From the Thirty Years’ War to the Outbreak of World War I (1618-1914)**

• In Our Time, “The Thirty Years War” (BBC podcast).
• In Our Time, “The Opium Wars,” (BBC podcast).

**Discussion Questions:**
1. Why and how did countries emerge from the devastation of the Thirty Years’ War?
2. What was the Concert of Europe and how did it help to preserve order in Europe?
3. Why does China refer to the period between 1939 and 1949 as the “century of humiliation”? How do you think it shapes how China views the world?
4. Why did World War I break out? Could it have been avoided?

**Class 2: From World War I Through World War II (1914-1945)**

• The Ever Widening War, “The War of Empires” (BBC radio program).
• The Ever Widening War, “The Atlantic War” (BBC radio program).
• President Woodrow Wilson, “Fourteen Points Speech,” January 8, 1918.
• HistoryExtra, “Appeasement and the road to World War Two” (podcast).

**Discussion Questions:**
1. What is isolationism? In what periods of history was American foreign policy defined by isolationism?
2. Why did the United States finally enter World War I?
3. Was the Treaty of Versailles too punitive? Did it lead to World War II?
4. What was the League of Nations and what did its backers believe it could accomplish?
5. What is appeasement, and did it help pave the way for World War II?
6. Was World War II inevitable? If so, what caused it? If not, what could have been done?

Class 3: The Cold War (1945-1989)

- President Harry S. Truman, “Address Before a Joint Session of Congress” (Truman Doctrine Speech), March 12, 1947.

Discussion Questions:
1. What factors contributed to the development of the Cold War? Was it inevitable?
2. What were the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan?
3. Why were NATO and the Warsaw Pact created? Were they successful?
4. Define “containment.” What were the assumptions of that strategy, and what were the alternatives? Was it a successful strategy?
5. Why did the Cold War stay “cold”? Why did the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union remain bounded?

Class 4: The Post-Cold War Era (1989-Present)


Discussion Questions:
1. Why did some scholars argue that the end of the Cold War marked the “end of history”? Do you agree with this thesis?
2. Why was Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait a challenge to order? Should the United States have used force to turn back Iraqi aggression?
3. What should the United States have done with its “unipolar moment” following the Cold War? How would you grade the United States on its performance?
4. Some argue that the United States and China are destined to become locked in a new cold war. Do you agree? If the United States and China do end up in a new cold war, what might be the consequences for both countries and for the world?

Section 2: Regions of the World

Class 5: Europe

- Susan Glasser, “Putin the Great: Russia’s Imperial Impostor,” *Foreign Affairs* (Sep/Oct 2019).
• Lawrence Freedman, “Britain Adrift,” Foreign Affairs (May/June 2020).

Discussion Questions:
1. How did Europe evolve from a place with so much strife (World Wars I and II) to a region largely at peace?
2. What is the European Union (EU) and what was the impetus behind it? What is meant by the debate between building a “United Europe of States” or a “United States of Europe”?
3. What is “Brexit” and how will it affect the future of the European project?
4. What accounts for the increased friction between the United States and Russia?
   Was it inevitable?
5. What is the most serious challenge facing Europe?
   How likely is the continent to meet the challenge?

Class 6: East Asia and the Pacific

• The World: A Brief Introduction, pages 82-96.
• The President’s Inbox, “Fredrik Logevall on Lessons of the Vietnam War” (podcast).
• The President’s Inbox, “What Should U.S. Policy Toward China Be?” (podcast).

Discussion Questions:
1. What accounts for Asia’s remarkable success in the 75 years following World War II?
2. What is the “Asian economic miracle” and what caused this economic boom?
3. Why did the United States fight the Korean War? Was the same rationale used to justify the Vietnam War? Were the assumptions and the wars justified?
4. What are the American and Chinese positions regarding the status of Taiwan?
   What are the origins of their disagreement regarding the island’s status?
5. Does a nuclear North Korea represent a threat to the United States?
   What should the United States do (if anything) to address it?

Class 7: South Asia

• The World: A Brief Introduction, pages 97-110.
Discussion Questions:

1. How would you describe the relationship between India and Pakistan?
2. What is the conflict over Kashmir?
3. Why did the United States fight a war in Afghanistan, and who was it fighting?
   Was the war successful? Why or why not?
4. How would you assess future prospects for India and Pakistan? Are they trending in the right or wrong direction?

Class 8: The Middle East

- President Barack Obama, “A New Beginning” (Cairo Speech), June 4, 2009.

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think accounts for the Middle East’s long history of strife?
2. To what extent does Iran represent a threat to the region?
3. Why are most countries of the Middle East lagging so many global measures of democracy and development?
4. What was the “Arab Spring”? What triggered it, and what was the outcome?
5. What was the Carter Doctrine and do you think it is still relevant today?
6. Why did the United States invade Iraq in 2003? Was it a preemptive or preventive war? Was the war justified?
7. Do you believe there will be a lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians? If so, what do you think such a peace would look like? If not, what will be the outcome?

Class 9: Africa

- Council on Foreign Relations, “Africa’s Leaders for Life” (Backgrounder).
- The Economist, “The march of democracy slows: Threats to democratic rule in Africa are growing, but time and demography are against the autocrats,” August 20, 2016.
- The Economist, “Africa is attracting ever more interest from powers elsewhere,” March 7, 2019.
**Discussion Questions:**

1. Observers often term Nigeria and South Africa the continent’s “two anchors.” Why are these two countries so important?
2. Why are outside powers increasingly interested in building influence in Africa?
3. Do you believe the continent’s economic growth will outpace the growth of its population, leading to further economic development, or will demographic pressures swallow up any growth?
4. Is democracy gaining ground in Africa, or is it receding to autocracy?
5. What is the role of the African Union?

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**Class 10: The Americas**


**Discussion Questions:**

1. What is the Monroe Doctrine and Roosevelt Corollary? Are they still in force?
2. What was the Cuban Missile Crisis? How was it resolved?
3. Which countries compose the “Northern Triangle” and what is causing widespread violence in these countries? How is that affecting migration patterns?
4. Why is the Amazon so important to global efforts to combat climate change? What can be done to protect the Amazon?
5. How did Venezuela fall from Latin America’s richest country to one where starvation is the norm?
6. What, if any, contribution is made by the Organization of American States (OAS)?
7. How has NAFTA reshaped the region?

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**Section 3: The Global Era**

**Class 11: Globalization**


Discussion Questions:
1. What is globalization?
2. What led to globalization?
3. What do you believe are the best and worst aspects of globalization? Whom has it helped and whom has it hurt? Try to provide examples from your own life.
4. To what extent can governments, international institutions, and individuals respond to, control, or limit the effects of globalization?

Class 12: Terrorism and Counterterrorism

• The World: A Brief Introduction, pages 166-172.
• The White House, National Strategy for Counterterrorism of the United States of America (October 2018).
• The President’s Inbox, “The Changing Landscape of Domestic Terrorism, With Bruce Hoffman” (podcast).

Discussion Questions:
1. What distinguishes terrorism from other forms of violence?
2. Why is it hard to prevent terrorism? What can be done to address this challenge?
3. Are there examples of terrorists who have succeeded in achieving their objectives?
4. What is the scale of the challenge terrorism presents to the United States? How much of a priority should the United States place on combating terrorism?

Class 13: Nuclear Proliferation

• The World: A Brief Introduction, pages 173-182.
• Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)

Discussion Questions:
1. Why do countries pursue nuclear weapons?
2. Countries can pursue “vertical proliferation” or “horizontal proliferation.” How do these differ?
3. What is the NPT and what are the agreement’s main pillars? Has it been successful at achieving its objectives?
4. Is a world with more nuclear powers more dangerous? Why or why not?
5. What policy tools can be used to thwart a country’s effort to develop nuclear weapons?
6. Which countries have nuclear weapons and which countries may be trying to build nuclear weapons? Do you think other countries will eventually try to develop nuclear weapons of their own? What would be the consequences?

Class 14: Climate Change

- Sarah Gibbens, “The Amazon is burning at record rates—and deforestation is to blame,” National Geographic, August 21, 2019.
- The President’s Inbox, “The Coming Climate Disruption, With Alice C. Hill” (podcast).

**Discussion Questions:**
1. What is climate change and how does it differ from pollution and the weather?
2. What causes climate change, and what evidence is there for it? Have you seen the effects of climate change in your daily life?
3. What can be done to address climate change (go into mitigation, adaptation, and geoengineering)? How can you alter your behavior to combat climate change?
4. What are the Paris Accords? Do you think countries will meet their obligations under the agreement? Is the agreement ambitious enough? If not, what else might be tried?

Class 15: Migration

- The President’s Inbox, “What Would a Smart Immigration Policy Look Like?” (podcast).

**Discussion Questions:**
1. How big of a challenge is migration? What are its causes and consequences?
2. What are the differences among an economic migrant, an internally displaced person, and a refugee? In what ways are the distinctions blurry?
3. Which countries are migrants attracted to? Which countries do they primarily come from?
4. What are the positive and negative effects of immigration on the country that migrants settle in?
5. In which ways are global arrangements regarding migrants insufficient? What should be done to address this gap?
Class 16: The Internet, Cyberspace, and Cybersecurity

- Laurens Cerulus and Mark Scott, “Europe seeks to lead a new world order on data,” POLITICO, June 7, 2019.

Discussion Questions:

1. How do the United States, Europe, and China differ on rules for regulating cyberspace?
2. How would you go about improving global governance in cyberspace?
3. What standards or norms do you believe need to be upheld in cyberspace?
4. Why is it so difficult to deter cyber attacks?

Class 17: Global Health

- The President’s Inbox, “Epidemics in World History, With Frank M. Snowden” (podcast).
- Bill Gates, “How the pandemic will shape the near future” (TED Talk).

Discussion Questions:

1. What is a noncommunicable disease and how does it differ from a communicable disease? Why are noncommunicable diseases a bigger problem now than they have been in the past? How should this issue factor into the global health agenda?
2. How did COVID-19 morph from a local outbreak into a global pandemic? What can be done to halt the spread of the disease? What does it tell you about global health governance?
3. What is the World Health Organization’s mission and how would you rate its effectiveness?
4. What are the International Health Regulations (IHR), and have countries met their obligations under the IHR?
5. What more might be done to improve global health?
Class 18: Trade and Investment

- The President’s Inbox, “Should the United States Rethink Its Trade Policy?” (podcast).

**Discussion Questions:**
1. Why do countries trade with one another? What is the concept of comparative advantage?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of international trade?
3. What are the types of barriers countries erect to manage trade?
4. Do you believe international trade is a net positive?
5. In what ways has the global trading system fallen short and what can be done to strengthen it?
6. What can be done to help individual workers whose jobs disappear?

Class 19: Currency and Monetary Policy


**Discussion Questions:**
1. What is monetary policy?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a relatively strong currency and a relatively weak currency?
3. How can a central bank influence – or manipulate – its country’s exchange rate?
4. What is the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) mission? Has it been successful in achieving its stated goals?
5. Do you think the dollar will remain the world’s de facto reserve currency for the foreseeable future? Why or why not? What is the likeliest challenger?

Class 20: Development

• Jagdish Bhagwati, “Banned Aid: Why International Assistance Does Not Alleviate Poverty” (review of Dead Aid), Foreign Affairs (Jan/Feb 2010).

Discussion Questions:
1. In which areas has global development advanced the most over the last half century? In which areas does it still lag?
2. Why do some countries succeed in developing their economies while others fall behind?
3. Does international aid help poorer countries develop? What other tools might help?
4. What is the World Bank’s mission, and how successful has the organization been in carrying out that mission?

Section 4: Order and Disorder

Class 21: Sovereignty

• The World: A Brief Introduction, pages 253-261.
• In Our Time, “Sovereignty,” (BBC podcast).
• United Nations, “Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 16 September 2005” (Responsibility to Protect principle).

Discussion Questions:
1. Define sovereignty. How did this concept help establish the modern international system and increase order?
2. How has the notion of sovereignty evolved over the years? Focus on the responsibility to protect (R2P) doctrine and how has it made a difference?
3. To what extent should countries respect each other’s sovereignty? What are the costs and benefits of violating another country’s sovereignty, such as under the R2P doctrine?
4. What is “sovereign obligation”? Would the adoption of this concept lead to more order in the world?

Class 22: Self-Determination

• The World: A Brief Introduction, pages 261-262.

**Discussion Questions:**
1. What is self-determination? Should it be recognized as a right?
2. What criteria should be used to determine which groups or territories get to become independent countries and who should decide that criteria?
3. Should any stateless people or group – such as the Kurds or the Palestinians – get a country of their own?

### Class 23: Balance of Power


**Discussion Questions:**
1. What is the balance of power and how does it come about? How does it end?
2. What are the terms used to describe different constellations of power? Which term would you use to describe the current distribution of power?
3. Thinking back to the historical eras discussed earlier, which eras lacked a balance of power and what were the consequences of this lack of balance?

### Class 24: Alliances and Coalitions


**Discussion Questions:**
1. What does it mean for a country to have an alliance with another?
2. Why do countries form alliances with one another?
3. What are the prerequisites of a successful alliance?
4. What are examples of alliances that have contributed to stability and order and those that have contributed to disorder?
5. Are America’s alliances a net benefit or a burden for the country?

### Class 25: International Society

Discussion Questions:
1. What is the democratic peace theory? What are its limitations?
2. What is economic interdependence theory? Can you think of a historical example that supports this theory and one that contradicts it?
3. Why was the United Nations (UN) established and what is its mission?
4. What do you think accounts for the UN’s inability to play a more central role in promoting and upholding order? How would you reform the UN to allow it to increase its contribution to order?
5. To what extent has international law contributed to a lessening of conflict?

Class 26: War Between Countries


Discussion Questions:
1. Why do countries go to war?
2. When is war justifiable?
3. How are conventional and unconventional wars different? Can you give examples of each?
4. What is the difference between a preemptive and preventive war? Can you give examples of each?
5. Some argue that the world has become a fundamentally more peaceful place, and wars are in decline. Do you agree or disagree?

Class 27: Internal Instability and War Within Countries

- Stewart Patrick, “The Brutal Truth: Failed states are mainly a threat to their own inhabitants. We should help them anyway.” *Foreign Policy*, June 20, 2011.

Discussion Questions:
1. What do people mean when they refer to a “weak state” or a “failed state”? Can you give examples of each in the current world?
2. What causes a country to become a weak or failed state?
3. Why do internal conflicts such as civil wars break out?
4. What policy tools are available to deal with challenges to order within borders?
5. What is “nation-building”? Can you name examples of successful and unsuccessful nation-building efforts?

Class 28: The Liberal World Order

- The President’s Inbox, “The Liberal World Order,” (podcast).

*Discussion Questions:*

1. How would you define the liberal world order? What is “liberal” about the order?
2. Which countries object to the liberal world order, and why do they do so?
3. Is there any evidence that the liberal world order is weakening? If so, what can be done to strengthen it?
4. Are there viable alternatives to a U.S.-led world order? Who would lead such an order and what would it look like?
5. Do you believe the liberal world order benefits the United States? Why or why not?