

HUMANITIES 4620

Geopolitics

Fall 2021
Mon. and Wed. 12:00–1:20pm
Rm 5566

INSTRUCTOR

Prof. Joshua Derman
Office: Rm 3352
E-Mail: hmderman@ust.hk

COURSE DESCRIPTION

“Geopolitics” has different meanings. It can refer to the way that geography influences the international conduct of states. It can signify an approach to international politics that emphasizes the importance of territory, resource endowments, and population. More broadly, the modern discourse of geopolitics, which first emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, has concerned itself with the determinants of great power politics in a global age. This course proposes to examine twentieth-century international history through the perspective of geopolitics in all the aforementioned meanings of the term.

HUMA 4620 aims to introduce students to some of the big questions and controversies that have engaged historians and historically-minded social scientists who study modern international politics. Focusing on the balance of power in Eurasia, it explores the rise of great power rivalries at the turn of the twentieth century; the origins and outcomes of the two world wars; the Cold War and the dawn of the atomic age; and the relevance of geopolitics in our current era of globalization. It also seeks, from the perspective of international theory, to investigate some of the key geopolitical theses of the twentieth century. The course readings are interdisciplinary in nature, drawing on history, international relations, political theory, economics, and geography to illuminate the ramifications of geopolitical thinking.

The course will be conducted in seminar format. There are no formal lectures, though the instructor will begin selected class meetings, marked with an asterisk (*), with a longer context-setting introduction. Students will be responsible for analyzing and debating the assigned readings through group discussion, guided by the instructor.

Intended learning outcomes (ILOs):

1. Acquire familiarity with the central themes and arguments of modern geopolitical thought.
2. Develop familiarity with key geopolitical events and trends in the past two centuries.
3. Gain experience reading and discussing theoretical texts.
4. Acquire proficiency in writing analytical essays.

ASSESSMENTS

1. Attendance: 10%
 - Attendance is mandatory and will be checked at 20 intervals during the course of the semester. Each unexcused absence will result in a 5-point deduction in the attendance score.
2. Participation: 15%
 - Students will be assessed on their willingness to participate and engage in group discussion. Participation can take the form of making a comment, asking a question, or responding to other students.
3. July Crisis simulation: 15% (in-class October 4)
 - A simulation of the July 1914 crisis will take place in class on October 4. Students will be divided into groups representing the countries that participated in the outbreak of the First World War: Germany, Austria-Hungary, Serbia, Russia, France, and Great Britain. Each group will prepare for the simulation by reading a packet of primary source documents related to European diplomacy in the decade leading up to the war. The groups will then seek to defend their countries' conduct through an in-class debate.
4. Midterm paper (due Nov. 10): 30%
 - Students will write a 10 pp. paper based on the assigned readings addressing a set topic, e.g. "What role did geography, natural resources, and population play in determining the outcome of the two world wars?"
5. Take-home essay exam (due Dec. 7): 30%
 - Students will write three short essays on set topics related to the course readings.
 - Topics will be distributed on the last day of class. Students will have until Dec. 7 to submit their answers.

ASSIGNED READINGS

All readings are available as PDFs from the course Canvas website. Students are highly encouraged to print out the readings to facilitate annotation and careful study. Swiping through longer texts on a computer screen, tablet, or phone is not conducive to close reading or remembering.

EXPECTATIONS

Students who are forced to miss an assessment due to illness or other emergency must provide a doctor's note or equivalent; otherwise a make-up test or extension cannot be arranged. Without a legitimate excuse, late assignments will be docked 5 points (out of a total 100) per day they are late.

The internet is a wonderful resource; it contains an endless amount of information. Some of it is accurate. Much of it is dubious. A lot is plain wrong. Most of it will be *irrelevant* for the

purposes of this class. Looking things up on the web can be at most a supplement to—but not a substitute for—attending the course meetings and doing the readings.

Once the paper topic is announced, class time will be devoted to discussion of proper practices for academic citation, quotation, and paraphrasing. Students are not expected to do any outside reading for either the paper or the take-home essay exam, which test comprehension of the assigned readings and ability to interpret and synthesize them.

This course enforces a zero-tolerance policy on cheating and plagiarism. If a student is found to have cheated on an exam or committed plagiarism on a paper, the case will be immediately referred to the head of the Humanities Division for further investigation.

COURSE OUTLINE

Sept. 1: Introduction and orientation

Sept. 6: Globalization and world politics*

- William R. Keylor, *The Twentieth-Century World and Beyond*, pp. 1–39.

Sept. 8: The rise of continental states

- Friedrich Ratzel, “Studies in Political Areas” (1897–98)
- Halford J. Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History” (1904)

Sept. 13: The politics of alliances*

- Gordon Martel, *Origins of the First World War*, pp. 1–50.

Sept. 15: Economic power

- Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, pp. 194–249.

Sept. 20: The outbreak of the First World War

- Martel, *Origins of the First World War*, pp. 51–102.

Sept. 22: **No class**

Sept. 27: Fighting the First World War*

- Keylor, *The Twentieth-Century World and Beyond*, pp. 43–71.

Sept. 29: The balance of forces

- Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, pp. 256–74.
- Daniel Yergin, *The Prize*, pp. 167–83.

Oct. 4: **July Crisis simulation**

Oct. 6: Alternative endings to the First World War

- Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, pp. 282–317.

Oct. 11: Versailles and after*

- Keylor, *The Twentieth-Century World and Beyond*, pp. 72–85, 93–129.

Oct. 13: Hitler and global politics

- Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, pp. 131–44, 641–67.
- Gerhard L. Weinberg, ed., *Hitler's Second Book*, pp. 15–27, 81–118, 228–38.

Oct. 18: The collapse of the postwar settlement*

- Keylor, *The Twentieth-Century World and Beyond*, pp. 130–68.

Oct. 20: Dividing the world

- Carl Schmitt, *Writings on War*, pp. 75–124.
- Joshua Derman, “Prophet of a Partitioned World”

Oct. 25: The Second World War*

- Keylor, *The Twentieth-Century World and Beyond*, pp. 169–92, 219–50.

Oct 27: How close was it?

- Alan J. Levine, “Was World War II a Near-run Thing?”
- Mark Harrison, “The Economics of World War II: An Overview,” pp. 1–27 and accompanying charts.

Nov. 1: How did the Allies win? (I)

- Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won*, pp. 1–24, 101–33.

Nov. 3: How did the Allies win? (II)

- Overy, *Why the Allies Won*, pp. 180–244, 282–313.

Nov. 8: Why did Japan surrender?

- Sadao Asada, “The Shock of the Atomic Bomb and Japan’s Decision to Surrender—A Reconsideration.”
- Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, “The Atomic Bombs and the Soviet Invasion: Which Was More Important in Japan’s Decision to Surrender?”

Nov. 10: The USA and the balance of power in Eurasia

- Robert J. Art, “The United States, The Balance of Power, and World War II: Was Spykman Right?”

Nov. 15: Containment and the Cold War*

- John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War*, pp. 5–47.
- X [George F. Kennan], “The Sources of Soviet Conduct.”

Nov. 17: Building the liberal international order*

- G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory*, pp. 163–214.

Nov. 22: Trade and territoriality

- Richard Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Trading State*, pp. 3–43.

Nov. 24: Realism and geopolitics

- John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 29–54, 83–137.

Nov. 29: The return of Eurasia

- Readings TBA