

HSS 404-102
Capstone
THEORY OF GLOBAL POLITICS:
WAR, STRATEGY AND MISPERCEPTION, 1648-1945

Fall 2024

Office hours: Tuesdays 5-5:30 pm

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Office: Cullimore 308

Class times: Tuesdays 6 – 8:50 pm

Faculty Memorial Hall 319

Course Description: Misperception involves the discrepancy between the psychological environment of decision makers and the “operational”, fact-based environment of the real world. Decisions may be determined (and all too often are) by the former; effects or consequences constrained by the latter. (Images are not conceptualized as misperceptions because they involve normative judgments or idiosyncratic responses for which there exist no empirical, rational or objective standards of evaluation).

This course will examine in detail the relationship between misperception on the part of decision makers and the processes leading to particular wars during the period 1648-1945. Conceptually, the course will question the rational models of conflict constructed by generations of military historians which work from the assumption that leaders accurately perceive external threats and opportunities and select policies based on rational calculation in order to advance national interests. Different conclusions emerge from Historical studies of decision-making and crisis behavior. Attention will be devoted to the impact of ideas and identifiable personal factors on the course of event as well as the relationship between the human element and the conventions, structures, ethical precepts, and institutions that distinguished European societies during this period and help explain the pattern of interstate relationships and conflict.

The first part of the course consists of weekly discussions of the salient literature on the subject including extracts from international theory, systemic empirical research, crisis resolution and historical studies of decision-making and crisis behavior.

Section two will extract key theoretical perspectives from this literature and apply these to concrete case studies of selected crisis situations leading to actual war.

Course Goals: By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Critically analyze the latest research on the roots/dynamics of conflict.
- Understand the intricate dynamics behind high-level decision making (in both military and diplomatic realms) and how these relate to the perennial incidence of war.
- Clarify the role of personality, values, perception and belief systems as opposed to empirical “reality”—objective reasoning—in key policy decisions.
- Acquire enhanced understanding of contemporary world politics and be enabled to think more critically and creatively about war as a global cultural phenomenon and one integral to world history; defying attempts at accurate prediction, manipulation or control.
- Acquire enhanced analytical thinking and compositional skills by doing the extensive reading and writing that is involved in this course.

Assignments and Marks:

Written Assignments:	40%
Midterm Quiz	20%
Final Quiz:	30%
Class Attendance and Participation:	10%

Grading Scale for Assignments and Participation:

A = 85 – 100	B+ = 80 – 84.5	
B = 75 – 79.5	C+ = 69.5 – 74.5	
C = 65 – 69.5	D = 50 – 64.9	F = 49.9 – 0

Course Requirements:

- There will be 4 in-class written assignments throughout the course and each will be 3 to 4 pages in length.
- These assignments will be based on class lectures, assigned readings, class handouts and occasional online links.
- No computers, phones, or other electronic devices as well as written or printed material will be permitted.
- Absence and makeup arrangements will only be permitted with an official notification from the Dean of Students.
- The assignments will equal 40% of the final class grade.
- Students taking the class acknowledge that they have carefully read and understand the entire syllabus (i.e. required reading, mark distribution, in-class writing assignments, etc.)

Course Assignments:

1. Tuesday, September 24: First in-class written assignment.
2. Tuesday, October 15: Second in-class written assignment.
3. Tuesday, November 5: Third in-class written assignment.
4. Tuesday, November 19: Fourth in-class written assignment.

Class texts: (required readings)

Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict*, (NY, 2001)
 R. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, (2017).
 Ken Booth and Nicholas Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma* (McMillan: London, 2007).

Semester Schedule:

Tues., Sept. 3, Sept. 10: Introduction: War and Misperception: Theoretical Perspectives and Analytical Problems.

Readings: Jervis, Introduction; K.W. Schweizer, War and Misperception: Synthesis of the Literature (to be supplied).

Sept. 17, Sept. 24: Common Forms of Misperception: Security Dilemma

Readings: Jervis, chs. 1, 4; Van Evera, ch. 1; Booth, Introduction.

Oct. 1: Key Variables: Power and Capability; First Move Advantage and Consequences: Declining Power and Preventative Motivation.

Readings: Van Evera, ch. 3; Jervis, ch. 9; Booth, part 1.

Oct. 8: Diplomatic Configurations/Alliance Dynamics.

Readings: Van Evera, ch. 3; Booth, ch. 6; Schweizer, “Diplomacy’s Seamless Web” (to be supplied); “Diplomacy”, (to be supplied).

Oct. 15: Balance of Military Technology: Impactive Forces

Readings: Jervis, ch. 6; Van Evera, ch. 4; Schweizer, “Clausewitz Revisited,” (to be supplied).

Oct. 22: Midterm Quiz

Oct. 29: Cognitive Dissonance and International Dynamics

Readings: Jervis, chs. 4, 11; Van Evera, ch. 6; Booth, ch. 4.

Nov. 5: Offensive-Defensive Theory and the Security Dilemma

Reading: Jervis, ch. 6; Van Evera, ch. 6; Booth, chs. 4, 7; Schweizer, “Deterrence” (to be supplied).

Nov. 12: Domestic Politics and Perception/Misperception

i: Readings: Jervis, ch. 6; Booth, ch. 2.

Nov. 19: ii: Misperception and the Origins of World War I

Readings: Van Evera, ch. 7; Stoessinger, ch. 1.

Dec. 3: Review

Dec. 10: Final Quiz

Policies:

- This is an **intellectually demanding course** and all students will be expected to do all the readings listed in the syllabus.
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- Attendance will be taken during each class. Absences will be excused only with documentation from the Dean of Students.
- Plagiarism in any written assignment will result in an automatic failure and will be reported to the Dean of Students.
- There will be no “make-up” quiz. If you miss the midterm or final quiz, documentation from the Dean of Students must be provided in order to make up the quiz.
- All submitted work must comply with the NJIT Honor Code. You can view NJIT Honor Code at: NJIT website, just Google: “academic integrity.”