



Mahidol University
International College

ICIR 204 Perspectives on International Relations

Course description:

This course examines major perspectives on International Relations such as Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism and Critical Theory. Students will apply different conceptual frameworks to a range of issues in global politics and reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of particular perspectives. Students will examine a range of issues in international relations such as terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, human rights, trade, investment and finance and apply multiple theoretical perspectives to analyze these issues.

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Assessment

Classroom participation	10%
Student activities	10%
Quizzes	15%
Group presentation	40%
Final essay	35%

Course Learning Outcomes

At the completion of the course the student will be able to:

1. Students will show awareness of the plurality of possible interpretations of global politics.
2. Students will deepen their understanding of major perspectives in international relations
3. Students will critically discuss the applicability of particular frameworks to selected cases.
4. Students will be able to discuss nuances and differences within major theoretical perspectives.
5. Students will reflect on the potential and limitations of different theoretical perspectives on international relations.

Topic No.	Topic
1	Introduction: Perspectives, Levels of Analysis, and Causal Arrows
2	Realist Perspectives on Today's World I: Prisoner's Dilemma, Anarchy, State Actors and Sovereignty
3	Realist Perspectives on Today's World II: Balance of Power, Polarity and Alliances, War
4	Liberal Perspectives on Today's World I: Interdependence, Collective Security, NGOs, Diplomacy and Cooperation
5	Liberal Perspectives on Today's World II: Collective Goods, International Institutions, International Law
6	Constructivist Perspectives on Today's World: Ideas and Identities, Democracy, Religion, Nationalism and Human Rights
7	Critical Perspectives on Today's World: Post-colonialism, Post-structuralism, and Feminism
8	Case Study Presentations
9	Realist and Liberal Perspectives on Globalization: Security, Domestic Economy, Investment and Finance
10	Constructivist Perspectives on Globalization: Development and Environment
11	Critical Perspectives on Globalization: Inequality, Imperialism, and Injustice
12	Review and Concluding Discussion

Assessment Criteria:

1. Classroom Participation 10%

Classroom participation is based on attendance, preparation for class and the quality of students' participation in class discussions.

2. Student activities 10%

Students can receive up to 10% for their written work as part of the student activities.

3. Quizzes 15%

There will be three unannounced quizzes during the term, each contributing to max. 5% of the final grade.

4. Group Presentation 40%

Students will present a selected contemporary international relations issue, applying one or several theoretical perspectives that were discussed in the class. After the presentation, the students are expected to answer questions from the audience and to trigger and moderate a discussion about their presentation topic.

5. Essay 35%

The final essay is a response of 2000 to 3000 words to one of several proposed essay questions. Students can come up with individual essay questions but need to seek approval from the instructor first. The paper should be well-organized, make a clear and compelling argument, contain a thesis statement, and fully cite all sources. Students should incorporate course readings as sources and adhere to academic conventions when writing their paper.

Introduction: Perspectives, Levels of Analysis, and Causal Arrows

Topic description: This week's class introduces the various elements of understanding and analyzing international relations. Students will learn about the role of perspectives and levels of analysis for the study of global politics and critically examine how causalities are identified and established.

Key questions: What are the characteristics of different perspectives on international relations? Can we isolate causes from effects? Should we describe international relations as the logic of consequences or better as the logic of appropriateness? How does critical theory differ from other perspectives on international relations?

Expected learning outcomes:

- Students will be able to compare and contrast different perspectives on international relations
- Students will identify causal arrows, perspectives and levels of analysis underlying selected articles on issues in international relations.
- Students will critically discuss how causality, perspectives and levels of analysis are closely intertwined.

Readings and activities:

- **Nau.2019. Chapter I.**
- Bennet, Andrew. 2013. 'The Mother of All Isms: Causal Mechanisms and Structural Pluralism in International Relations Theory.' *European Journal of International Relations*. 19(3): 459-481.
- Cantir, Christian and Juliet Kaarbo. 2012. 'Contested Roles and Domestic Politics: Reflections on the Role of Theory on Foreign Policy Analysis and International Relations Theory.' *Foreign Policy Analysis*. 8(1): 5-24.
- Jepperson, Ronald and John W. Meyer. 2011. 'Multiple Levels of Analysis and the Limitations of Methodological Individualism.' *Sociological Theory*. 29(1): 54-73.
- **Wendt, Alexander. 1998. 'On Constitution and Causation in International Relations. *Review of International Studies*. 24(5): 101-118.**
- **Student activity:** Students will read and analyze a set of opinions on whether an international treaty is the best way to deal with cyberwarfare. They will identify causal arrows established in those pieces and explain from which perspective the authors are writing as well as the levels of analysis at which their arguments are operating.

Realist Perspectives on Today's World I: Prisoner's Dilemma, Anarchy, State Actors and Sovereignty

Topic description: This week's class focuses on understanding major trends in international politics from the realist perspective. Students will examine unipolarity as a feature of the Post-Cold War world and discuss the view of terrorism and other asymmetric threats as products of a largely unipolar world.

Key questions: What is meant by unipolarity in the current international system and what are its implications? Are institutions essentially "arenas for acting out power relationships"? Does terrorism constitute a systematic threat to stability in the world? What is a realist approach to managing ethnic conflicts? According to realists, why was the partition of Palestine necessary?

Expected Learning Outcomes:

- Students will be able to critically discuss the importance of power in realist theory.
- Students will be able appraise the significance of unipolarity for international relations

- Students will be able to critically examine the notion of sovereignty and the concept of “failed state”

Readings and activities:

- **Nau, 2019. Chapter V.**
- Eriksen, Stein Sundstol. 2011. ‘State failure’ in theory and practice: the idea of the state and the contradictions of state formation.’ *Review of International Studies*. 37: 229-247.
- Fukuyama, Francis. 2004. *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Herbst, Jeffrey. ‘Responding to State Failure in Africa.’ *International Security*. 21(3): 1996-97.
- Ikenberry, John, Michael Mastanduno, and William C. Wohlforth. 2009. ‘Introduction: Unipolarity, State Behaviour and Systemic Consequences.’ *World Politics*. 61(1): 1-27.
- Sambanis, Nicholas. 2000. ‘Partition as a Solution to Ethnic War: An Empirical Critique of the Theoretical Literature.’ *World Politics*. 52: 437-83.
- **Student activity:** Students will debate partition as a solution to ethnic conflict.

Realist Perspectives on Today’s World II: Power, Security Dilemma, Balance of Power, Polarity and Alliances, War

Topic description: Students will be introduced to the debates between proponents of power transition theory and power balancing with a special focus on China and Russia. In the second part of the class, students will examine the realist take on ethnic conflict and proposed solutions for political stability, with particular emphasis on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Key questions: How do realists view the position of the United States in the post-Cold War world? What are the different assumptions of the power transition and power balancing schools within realism and what are the consequences of those assumption for US policy recommendations?

Expected learning outcomes:

- Students will become aware of debates and controversies within the Realist school of international relations.
- Students will be able to discuss and debate the future of US power drawing from power transition theory and power balancing theory.
- Students will be able to compare power capabilities of major countries in the world.
- Students will be able discuss realist perspectives on conflicts and apply those perspectives to specific cases.

Readings and activities:

- **Harris, Peter. 2014. ‘Problems with Power-Transition Theory: Beyond the Vanishing Disparities Thesis.’ *Asian Security*. 10(3): 241-259.**
- Lebow, Richard Ned and Benjamin Valentino. 2009. ‘Lost in Transition: A Critical Analysis of Power Transition Theory.’ *International Relations* 23(3). pp. 389-410.
- Mearsheimer, John and Stephen Van Evera. 1995. ‘When Peace Means War.’ *New Republic*. December 18. 16-21.
- Waltz, Kenneth N. 1993. ‘The New World Order’. *Millenium: Journal of International Studies*. 22(2): 187-95.
- **Student activity:** Students will develop an infographic indicating dimensions of power and comparing power capabilities of the United States, Russia and China.

Liberal Perspectives on Today's World I: Interdependence, Collective Security, NGOs, Diplomacy and Cooperation

Topic description: This week's class introduces the liberal perspective to explain and understand major events in international politics since the Cold War. It will show how liberal accounts focus on the integrating dynamics of international institutions and economic interdependence. Students will learn about the differences between ideational liberalism, commercial liberalism and republican liberalism.

Key questions: Which factors are most significant for global interdependence? How important are non-state actors in global politics? How do repeated interactions influence international affairs? Are diplomacy, negotiation and bargaining always a better option than the use of force? What makes military intervention legitimate?

Expected learning outcomes:

- Students will understand how liberal perspectives can shape strategies in international relations
- Students will be able to assess the effects of interdependence in global politics
- Students will compare and contrast different schools of thought within the liberal perspective on international relations.

Readings and activities:

- Bulmer, Simon and Lucia Quaglia. 2018. 'The politics and economics of Brexit.' *Journal of European Public Policy*. 25(8): 1089-1098.
- Keohane, Robert O. and Joseph Nye. 1989. *Power and Interdependence*. Cambridge, MA: HarperCollins. 20-25.
- Hurd, Ian. 2007. *After Anarchy: Legitimacy and Power in the United Nations Security Council*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Nau. 2019. Chapter V.
- Thompson, Alexander. 2006. 'Coercion through IOs: The Security Council and the Logic of Information Transmission.' *International Organization*. 60. 1-34.
- **Student activity 1:** Students will critically engage with selected theory talks by selected influential IR scholars (<http://www.theory-talks.org/2008/05/theory-talk-7.html>) and position the individual scholar in relation to liberalism and realism in IR theory.
- **Student activity 2:** Students will discuss the notion of Brexit as an indication of post-liberal politics.

Liberal Perspectives on Today's World II: Collective Security, International Institutions, and Law

Topic description: This week's class further examines liberal perspectives on international relations by exploring the concept of collective security and reviewing in detail major international organizations such as the United Nations, NATO, the European Union and ASEAN. Students will be familiarized with the basic rules of international law and discuss judicial decision making at the international level.

Key questions: How can international organizations limit conflict according to the liberal perspective? How do international institutions work? How does the liberal perspective understand the role of International Law in world politics?

Expected learning outcomes:

- Students will be able to apply the liberal perspective to explain and understand major events in international politics.

- Students will be able to discuss the growing importance of NGOs and international law in contemporary world affairs.

Readings and activities:

- Greig, J. Michael and Paul F. Diehl. 2005. 'The Peacekeeping-Peacemaking Dilemma.' *International Studies Quarterly*. 49: 621-645.
- **Mitchell, Ronald B. 2009. 'The Influence of International Institutions: Institutional Design, Compliance, Effectiveness and Endogeneity.'** In Helen V. Miker and Andrew Moravcsik (eds.). *Power, Interdependence, and Non-state Actors in World Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Pugh, Michael. 2007. 'Peace Enforcement'. In Thomas G. Weiss and Sam Daws (eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of the United Nations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- **Student activity 1:** Students will examine the case study of the 1991 Iraq War on the one hand and subsequent conflicts in Rwanda, Somalia and Libya on the other hand. They will compare and contrast successes and failures of collective security approaches in both cases.
- **Student activity 2:** Students will select case studies of conflict areas and examine the role of the United Nations in conflict resolutions. They will discuss the potential and limitations of the UN in their respective case study and compare their results.

The Constructivist Perspective on Today's World: Democracy, Religion, Nationalism, and Human Rights

Topic description: This week focuses on explanation of contemporary events from constructivist identity perspectives. Special emphasis will be on the role of democracy, religion, ethnicity, and human rights based politics. Students will examine how ethnic, religious and national conflicts are ideationally constructed and how the creation of new norms may provide solutions to these problems.

Key questions: Are social identities primordial or are they constructed? If they are constructed, who constructs them? Is it possible to have overarching solutions to ethnic conflicts? Or does this type of conflict require responses that depend on the individual situation? What is the difference between viewing terrorism as war, terrorism as crime, and terrorism as ideological conflict? What policies are suggested by each of these views? What are human rights? Are human rights universal? If not, can they be human rights?

Expected learning outcomes:

- Students will be able to critically discuss the role of ideas and ideologies in world politics.
- Students will be able to identify and discuss ideational factors that contribute to identity-building.
- Students will reflect on the role of values in the conduct of politics.

Readings and activities:

- Bell, Daniel. 2000. *East Meets West: Human Rights and Democracy in East Asia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1-19;
- ----. 2006. *Beyond Liberal Democracy: Political Thinking for an East Asian Context*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Excerpts.
- Katzenstein, Peter J. (ed.). 1996. *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- **Nau. 2019. Chapter VII.**
- Major Alex Osborn. 2006. 'The "Clash of Civilizations" Thesis as a Tool for Explaining Conflicts in the Contemporary World.' *Defence Studies*. 5(3): 394-400.

- Tibi, Bassam. 2012. *Islam in Global Politics: Conflict and Cross-Civilizational Bridging*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge. 1-31.

Critical Perspectives on Today's World: Post-colonialism, Post-Structuralism, and Feminism

Topic description: This week's class looks at different strands of critical theory within international relations. Particular emphasis will be on postcolonial approaches to international relations, post-structuralist perspectives on the linkages between power and discourse, and gender analysis in global politics.

Key questions: What is the role of critical theory in international relations? Why should one criticize the status quo? What actors are powerful in international politics? How can power be linked to discourse? How does one's location in the world shape one's experience of the world?

Expected learning outcomes:

- Students will be able to discuss different postcolonial critiques of international relations and international relations theory.
- Students will be able to identify and analyze political discourses and discuss the links between power and discourse.
- Students will be able to apply gender-sensitive perspectives to global politics.

Readings and activities:

- **Caputo, Virginia. 2018. 'Too Young Too Wed': Envisioning a 'generous encounter' between feminism and the politics of childhood.' In Rachel Rosen and Katherine Twamley (eds.). *Feminism and the Politics of Childhood: Friends or Foes?* London: UCL Press. 201-218.**
- Chandler, David. 2013. 'Promoting democratic norms? Social constructivism and the 'subjective limits' to liberalism.' *Democratization*. 20(2): 215-239.
- Dillon, Michael and Julian Reid. 2001. 'Global Liberal Governance: Biopolitics, Security and War.' *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*. 30(1): 44-66.
- Miller, Peter and Nikolas Rose. 2008. *Governing the Present: Administering Economic, Social and Personal Life*. Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press. 53-114.
- **Jan Wilkens. 'Postcolonialism in International Relations.' Online publication. November 2017. (<https://oxfordre.com/internationalstudies/abstract/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-101>) (30 July 2019).**
- **Student activity 1:** Students browse the UNICEF information on child marriages worldwide (<https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-marriage/>). They then write a proposal for a fictitious donor looking to fund a project to reduce and prevent child marriage in a specific country. Their proposal should include an overarching goal, specific objectives, and activities for implementation. It should describe the relevant partners who are involved in the project. The proposal should also include clear indicators of success and a plan to monitor and evaluate the project.
- **Student activity 2:** Students write a postcolonial critique of the movie *Blood Diamond* (Edward Zwick, 2006).

Case Study Presentations

Topic description: This week, students will present selected contemporary international relations issues in small groups, applying one or several theoretical perspectives of their choice.

Key questions: TBA

Expected learning outcomes:

- Students will be able to learn and work collaboratively.
- Students will be able to demonstrate interpersonal and intercultural skills.
- Students will be able to apply course contents to new case scenarios.
- Students will be able to communicate complex ideas in an oral presentation.

Readings and activities:

- To be confirmed by the presenters

Realist and Liberal Perspectives on Globalization: Security, Domestic Economy, Trade, Investment and Finance

Topic description: This week marks the beginning of the final section of the course, which looks at different theoretical perspectives on the complex phenomenon of globalization. This week's class examines the security, domestic economic, trade, investment and financial policies that support or hinder the international economy. Students will compare and contrast realist and liberal approaches to globalization and specifically focus on Strategic Trade Theory versus the Theory of Comparative Advantage.

Key questions: How does globalization actually operate? What policies and institutions are shaping it? What are the strengths of realist interpretations of globalization? The weaknesses? Why is the argument in favor of free trade associated with the liberal perspective on international politics? What does hegemonic stability theory suggest about the role of the hegemon in the world economy?

Expected learning outcomes:

- Students will be able to critically discuss material and institutional aspects of globalization.
- Students will be able to analyze the relationship between security and economics.

Readings and activities:

- Brander, James A. 1995. 'Strategic Trade Policy'. In Gene M. Grossman and Kenneth Rogoff (eds.). *Handbook of International Economics*. Vol. 3. Elsevier. 1243-2107.
- **Nau. 2019. Chapter VIII.**
- Gözgör, Giray, Mehmet Huseyin Bilgin and Klaus F. Zimmermann. 2019. *Public Employment Decline in Developing Countries in the 21st Century: The Role of Globalization*, GLO Discussion Paper, No. 326, Maastricht. Global Labor Organization (GLO).
- **Student activity:** Students will examine the so-called trade war between the United States and China. They will then formulate two position papers representing the US and Chinese view of the issue. They will pass on their position papers to a classmate, who will critically review them and write down comments.

Constructivist Perspectives on Globalization: Development and Environment

Topic description: The focus of this week will lie on the notion of development and the linkages between development and identities and values. Students will examine different paths of development in different regions. They will examine, how not only political stability, policies, trade strategies, but also cultural identities can shape development patterns around the world. The second part of the class will discuss the environmental stresses caused by development and critically analyze constructivist perspectives on environmental issues.

Key questions: Why have development patterns been so different across different regions? What is the role of domestic governance for a country's economic standing? Which aspects of governance might matter most for development? What constitutes social justice in the age of globalization?

Expected learning outcomes:

- Students will develop an understanding of the complex processes of development and conceptual approaches towards development
- Students will be able to describe and analyze development patterns in different parts of the world
- Students will be able to draw connections between development and identity construction
- Students will be able to comment on environmental implications of development agendas

Readings and activities:

- **Nau, 2019. Chapter IX.**
- O'Riordan, Tim. 2002. *Globalism, Localism and Identity: New Perspectives on the Transition of Sustainability*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Stoett, Peter. 2012. 'What are we really looking for? From eco-violence to environmentalism.' In Matthew A. Schnurr and Larry A. Swatuk (eds.). *Natural Resources and Social Conflict: Towards Critical Environmental Security*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 15-32.
- **Student activity:** Students will critically examine development initiatives in Ladakh and prepare a short presentation discussing the links between development and identity.

Critical Perspectives on Globalization: Inequality, Imperialism, and Injustice

Topic description: This week's class will critically interrogate patterns of causality established in mainstream International Relations theories and examine critical perspectives on globalization. It will discuss ways in which globalization and development have resulted from interconnected historical forces and social processes associated with the rise of the West. Students will examine notions of marginality and inequality as they have been articulated in different conceptual frameworks.

Key questions: How can inequality be measured? How important are relative gaps compared to absolute gaps? What governs interpretations and methodological preferences among economists? How valid are notions of neo-colonialism in the current era?

Expected learning outcomes:

- Students will develop a nuanced perspective on the notions of structure and agency.
- Students will be able to conduct discourse analyses of political texts.
- Students will be able to identify, explain and critique different strands of critical theory.
- Students will be able to formulate alternative accounts of globalization.

Readings and activities:

- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2000. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press. 3-27.
- **Foucault, Michel. 1988. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. Edited by Colin Gordon. New York: Random House. 63-77; 109-134.**
- **Nau. 2019. Chapter X.**

Student activity: Students will conduct a critical discourse analysis of Robert Kaplan's article "The Ruins of Empire in the Middle East" (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/05/25/ruins-of-empire-in-the-middle-east-syria-iraq-islamic-state-iran/>).

Review and Concluding Discussion

Topic description: This week's class will review the course material and contents. Students have the opportunity to ask more questions and to discuss the most difficult or challenging issues of the course.

Key questions: TBA

Expected learning outcomes:

- Students will consolidate their learning.
- Students will be able to summarize ideas and contents and draw comparisons.
- Students will be able to formulate critical questions and develop argumentative responses.

Readings and activities: TBA