

# 21<sup>st</sup> Century Great Power Strategy

*Syllabus - 2021*

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## Module Description:

How does classic strategic thinking help clarify great power strategies for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? To use a phrase from Raymond Aron, great powers compete and cooperate on the “strategic-diplomatic chessboard” of international relations. But, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the balance of power amongst the great powers is shifting, and the chessboard itself is changing in fundamental ways. The decline of the US is producing a messy untested era of multipolar power politics, demanding and inviting new strategies. The rise of China, furthermore, is not only the most rapid and largest in world history, it is also the most strategically complicated because of its global economic integration. India’s longstanding strategic autonomy has provided India with security, but is also limiting its strategic potential. Russia is the weakest of the great powers, but this makes its strategy possibly the most consequential. The EU has impressive economic and normative power, and its member states wield considerable military hard power, but the ambitions of the EU’s global strategy may outstrip even these capabilities. This course explores strategic thinking and applies it to clarify cases of great power strategies in the complicated and changing context of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## Recommended supplemental preparatory readings:

- Christopher Coker *Rebooting Clausewitz*
- Lawrence Freedman *Strategy: A History*
- Colin S. Gray *The Future of Strategy*

## Aims and Objectives:

Through this course, students will gain:

- Familiarity with the principles of strategic thinking,
  - Grasp of the International Relations theories that explain great power strategies,
  - Depth of exposure to great power strategies and challenges in contemporary practice,
- And
- Practice in applied strategy through analytical assignments and strategic crisis simulations.

## Course Overview:

### ***Part I: Stratégiste vs. Stratège: Strategy in Theory and Practice***

1. Introduction: Course Overview, Aims, and Objectives
2. The Great Strategists: War and the Principles of Strategic Thinking
3. Strategy as the 'Bridge that Relates Military Power to Political Purpose': Theorizing the Sources and Political Purposes of Great Power Strategies
4. Strategy as the 'Art of Creating Power': Understanding Power in Great Power Strategies (*Strategy Forum Post 1 due, 20%*)

### ***Part II: Great Power Strategies in a Changing Global Order***

5. Great Power Strategies in the Making of Global Order, 1814-15, 1919, 1945, 1989-91
6. US "Grand Strategy" After Liberal Hegemony
7. The Balance of Power and Russian Strategy
8. *Midway Reading and Study Break*
9. The EU Global Strategy, Stuck Between the Superpowers?
10. India's Strategic Autonomy and Strategic Potential
11. China's Global South Coalition Strategy (*Strategy Forum Post 2 due, 20%*)

### ***Part III: Strategic Challenges and Decisions***

12. Surrogate Warfare: Is Strategy Still a 'Battle of Wills'?
13. Strategic Crisis Simulation (*Participation 10%*)
14. Conclusion: The Future of Great Power Strategy (*EU Strategy Paper Due, 50%*)

## Assessment on course is comprised of:

- One EU Strategy Paper (50%)
- Two Strategy Forum Posts (20% each)

And

- Participation in One Strategic Crisis Simulation (10%)

*\*Instructions and assessment criteria will be made available on Moodle.*

### Course Calendar, 2021

1. - 20 April 10:00AM-11:00
2. - 27 April 13:00-14:30
3. - 4 May 13:00-14:30
4. - 11 May 13:00-14:30
5. - 18 May 13:00-14:30
6. - 25 May 13:00-14:30
7. - 1 June 13:00-14:30
8. - *Midway reading and study break*
9. - 8 June 13:00-14:30
10. - 15 June 13:00-14:30
11. - 22 June 13:00-14:30
12. - 29 June 13:00-14:30
13. - 6 July 13:00-14:30
14. - 13 July 13:00-14:30

## Weekly Readings and Lecture Descriptions:

### ***Part I: Stratégiste vs. Stratège: Strategy in Theory and Practice***

If strategy is a practice, performed by the practitioner *stratège* or *strategos*, the theorist and analyst that explains and assesses strategies, the *stratégiste*, does so ultimately for the purpose of improving the performance of strategy in practice. Part I of the Course firstly covers the principles of strategic thinking, as developed by the classic strategic thinkers such as Clausewitz, Thucydides, Kautilya, and Sun Tzu. Then, the IR theories that explain why great powers adopt different strategies are explored and given comparative assessment. Lastly, the concept of power and its role in strategy is given closer scrutiny.

#### **1. Introduction: Course Overview, Aims, and Objectives**

This lecture is devoted to providing a clear overview of the course, including reading and syllabus materials on this course, the learning objectives and rationale behind the steps that will be taken during this course, and the assignment instructions and deadlines.

*\*No reading, other than to review the syllabus.*

#### **2. The Great Strategists and the Principles of Strategic Thinking**

Classic strategic thought was developed as an aspect of war. To what extent and with what specific lessons and principles can classic strategic thinkers aid strategic thinking today? This lecture covers the principles of strategic thinking, as developed by the classic strategic thinkers such as Clausewitz, Thucydides, Kautilya, and Sun Tzu.

Class question:

- To what extent and with what specific principles of strategic thought can classic strategic thinkers, such as Clausewitz, aid strategic thinking today?

Essential reading:

- [Michael Howard, 'Introduction' to Clausewitz On War](#)
- [Clausewitz On War, 'Chapter I: Strategy', 'Chapter II: The Elements of Strategy'](#)

- [Michael Howard, 'The Relevance of Traditional Strategy', \*Foreign Affairs\*, 51:2 \(1973\), pp. 253-266.](#)

Further optional reading:

- [Christopher Coker \*Rebooting Clausewitz\*](#)
- Clausewitz *On War* (ideally the Oxford edition, not the Penguin).
- Thucydides *The Peloponnesian War*
- Kautilya *The Arthashastra*
- Sun Tzu *The Art of War*

### **3. Strategy as the 'Bridge that Relates Military Power to Political Purpose': Theorizing the Sources and Political Purposes of Great Power Strategies**

If strategy is the 'bridge that relates military power to political purpose', as suggested by the strategic theorist Collin Gray, the strategist needs not only familiarity with military means, and history of political ends, but also a theory to explain and understand the sources of political purposes. This lecture covers the role of *strategists* in relation to *strategy*, then visits the main IR theories that explain the deeper sources (as opposed to proximate causes) of great powers strategies.

Class questions:

- What is the role of the analytical civilian strategist, the *stratégiste*, as opposed to the practitioner *stratège*, and what function or purpose does theory serve in the former?
- How does Thucydides idea of the deep causes of war, as opposed to proximate causes, shape IR theory? How do these deep causes relate to political purposes?

Essential reading

- [Hew Strachan, 'Strategy in Theory; Strategy in Practice', \*Journal of Strategic Studies\*, 42:2, pp. 171-190.](#)
- [Stephen Walt, 'One World, Many Theories', \*Foreign Policy\*, 1998, pp. 29-46.](#)

Further optional reading

- For further reading on the role of strategists in theory vs. strategy in practice:
  - [Colin Gray \*The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice\*](#)
  - [Hedley Bull, 'Strategic Studies and Its Critics', \*World Politics\*, 20:4 \(1968\), pp. 593-605.](#)

- [Michael Howard, 'The Classical Strategists', \*Adelphi Series\*, 58: 472-474 \(1969\), pp. 179-214.](#)
- For further reading on IR theory, see the entries on IR theories in [\*Oxford Handbook of International Relations\*](#).
- For introductory descriptions of IR theories, possibly helpful are interviews with IR theorists on youtube, [here](#).

#### 4. Strategy as the 'Art of Creating Power': Understanding Power in Great Power Strategies (*Strategy Forum Post 1 due, 20%*)

The celebrated historian of strategic thought and practice, Lawrence Freedman, suggests that strategy is the 'art of creating power'. If this is the case, then what exactly is "power", and how is it created by strategy? This lecture gives the concept of power close scrutiny, distinguishing hard, soft, structural, and "useable" power. It also covers the problem of measuring power, the idea and strategic challenge of power shifts, and assesses the notion of "smart power" strategies.

Class questions:

- What are the different kinds of power and how do they shape the strategic behaviour of states?
- Is "smart power" a smart strategy?

Essential reading

- [Joseph Nye, 'Get Smart: Combining Hard and Soft Power', \*Foreign Affairs\*, 88:4 \(2009\), pp. 160-163.](#)
- [Nicholas Kitchen and Michael Cox, 'Power, Structural Power, and American Decline', \*Cambridge Review of International Affairs\*, 32:6, pp. 734-752.](#)

Further optional reading

- [Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, 'Power in International Politics', \*International Organization\*, 59:1 \(2005\), pp. 39-75.](#)

## ***Part II: Great Power Strategies in a Changing Global Order***

Part II of this course examines the strategies great powers have deployed in the modern practice of international relations. It firstly covers the history of major ordering moments and strategic choices made after great power wars. It then examines, explains, and assesses the contemporary strategies of great powers today, including the US, Russia, India, China, and the EU, if it can be considered a great power.

### **5. Great Power Strategies in the Making of Global Order, 1814-15, 1919, 1945, 1989-91**

In Part I, lecture 2, we covered the IR theories that explain why great powers adopt some strategies over others. In this lecture, the first of Part II, we first differentiate the gradations of small, middle, and great powers, and then “test” the explanations offered by IR theories, by examining the strategic choices made by great powers after great power wars in modern international history.

Class questions

- What is a “great power”?
- How have great powers used strategy not only to wage wars, but also to make order and a lasting peace after major wars?

Essential reading

- [G. John Ikenberry and Daniel H. Nexon, ‘Hegemony Studies 3.0: The Dynamics of Hegemonic Orders’, \*Security Studies\*, 28:3, pp. 395-421.](#)

Further optional reading

- [G. John Ikenberry \*After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars\*](#)
- [Robert Gilpin \*War & Change in World Politics\*](#)
- [K.J. Holsti \*Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order, 1648-1989\*](#)

### **6. US “Grand Strategy” After Liberal Hegemony**

The US has been the greatest great power since the end of the Cold War, and the leading “hegemon” of the Atlantic system since 1945. In this era, the US has pursued

a “grand strategy” of “liberal hegemony”. Today, however, the US is “exiting” from hegemony, and the “liberal” international order it has built is receding against a wave of rising illiberal powers.

#### Class questions

- Has the strategy of “liberal hegemony” been inherently self-defeating?
- Are there more effective alternative “grand strategies” available?
- How important is Europe in any US strategy?

#### Essential reading

- [G. John Ikenberry, ‘The End of the Liberal Order?’, \*International Affairs\*, 94:1 \(2018\), pp. 7-23.](#)
- [John J. Mearsheimer, ‘Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order’, \*Security Studies\*, 43:4 \(2019\), pp. 7-50.](#)
- [‘Interim National Security Strategic Guidance’, The White House, March 2021.](#)

#### Further optional reading

- [Mathew Burrows and Robert Manning, ‘Humility in American Grand Strategy’, \*War on the Rocks\*, March, 2021.](#)
- [Nina Silove, ‘Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of “Grand Strategy”, \*Security Studies\*, 27:1 \(2018\), pp. 27-57.](#)
- [Thomas Meaney and Stephen Wertheim, ‘Grand Flattery: The Yale Grand Strategy Seminar’, \*The Nation\*, 2012.](#)
- [Daniel H. Nexon, ‘Why the Great Power Competition Framework is Flawed’, \*Exit From Hegemony\*, 2021.](#)

## 7. The Balance of Power and Russian Strategy

Russia is the weakest of the great powers, but this makes its alignment crucial, because it potentially “holds the balance”. This lecture gauges the balance of power, considers how Russia qualifies as a great power, and examines, attempts to explain, and assesses Russian counter-hegemonic strategy as a “strategic competitor” today.

#### Class questions



- What is the balance of power and how does it shape strategy?
- Does Russia have a strategy, and how is it shaped by the balance of power?

#### Essential reading

- [Alexander Cooley and Daniel H. Nexon, 'Illiberal Tide: Why the International Order is Tilting Toward Autocracy', \*Foreign Affairs\*, 2021.](#)
- [Alexey Arbatov, 'Collapse of the World Order?', \*Russia in Global Affairs\*.](#)

#### Further optional reading

- [Rebecca Adler-Nissen and Ayse Zarakol, 'Struggles for Recognition: The Liberal International Order and the Merger of Its Discontent', \*International Organization\*, 2020.](#)
- [Alexander Cooley, Daniel Nexon, and Steven Ward, 'Revising Order or Challenging the Balance of Power? An Alternative Typology of Revisionist and Status-quo States', \*Review of International Politics\*, 45:4 \(2019\), pp. 689-708.](#)
- [Daniel H. Nexon, 'The Balance of Power in the Balance', \*World Politics\*, 61:2 \(2009\), pp. 330-59.](#)

### 8. Midway Reading and Study Break

*\*There are no lectures or classes scheduled this week.* During this week, read the EU Global Strategy in detail and develop your assessment of its strengths and weaknesses. This document will be reviewed the following week with the class as a whole and forms the basis of the EU Policy Paper Assignment.

*\*See the reading for the week following.*

### 9. The EU Global Strategy (*Strategy Forum Post 2 due, 20%*)

This lecture considers the ways in which the EU is a great power and reviews the strengths and weaknesses of the EU Global Strategy in a changing global order. It also provides guidance on the EU Strategy Paper Assignment instructions.

#### Class questions

- Is the EU a “power”? If so, what kind?
- How effective is the EU global strategy?

#### Essential reading

- [European Union Global Strategy](#)
- [Karen E. Smith, ‘A European Union Global Strategy for a Changing World?’, \*International Politics\*, 2017.](#)

#### Further optional reading

- [Nathalie Tocci, ‘Resilience and the Role of the European Union in the World’, \*Contemporary Security Policy\*, 41:2 \(2020\), pp. 176-194.](#)
- [Implementing the EU Global Strategy Year 2.](#)

### 10. India’s Strategic Autonomy and Strategic Potential

India, since decolonization, has pursued a strategy of preserving strategic autonomy. This lecture examines how India has pursued strategic autonomy, attempts to explain why it has not aligned more closely with other great powers, and considers whether and the extent to which India should.

#### Class questions

- Is India’s long-standing policy of strategic autonomy still conducive to India’s security?
- Should India pursue regional hegemony, or should it deep strategic ties with Quad powers, for instance?

#### Essential reading

- [Rohan Mukherjee, ‘Chaos as Opportunity: The United States and World Order in India’s Grand Strategy’, \*Contemporary Politics\*, 26:4 \(2020\), pp. 420-438.](#)

#### Further optional reading

- [Manjeet S. Pardesi, ‘American Global Primacy and the Rise of India’, \*Asia Pacific\*, 129 \(2017\).](#)

- [Rahul Roy-Chaudhury and Kate Sullivan de Estrada, 'India, the Indo-Pacific and the Quad', \*Survival: Global Politics and Strategy\*, 60;3 \(2018\).](#)

## 11.China's Global South Coalition Strategy

The rise of China is not only the most rapid and largest in world history, it is also the most complicated because of its global economic integration. This lecture examines China's emerging strategy of building a global coalition of states to balance the US, attempts to explain it, and assesses its viability and implications for the emerging global order.

### Class questions

- What is China's strategy?
- What kind of world order is China's strategy designed to produce?
- How does economic interdependence complicate China's strategy?

### Essential reading

- [Alvaro Mendez and Chris Alden, 'China in Panama: From Peripheral Diplomacy to Grand Strategy', \*Geopolitics\*, 2019.](#)
- [Evelyn Goh, 'Contesting Hegemonic Order: China in East Asia', \*Security Studies\*, 28:3 \(2019\), pp. 614-644.](#)

### Further optional reading

- Odd Arne Westad, 'The Sources of Chinese Conduct: Are Washington and Beijing Fighting a New Cold War?', *Foreign Affairs*, 2019. [Youtube.](#)
- [China Foresight, LSE IDEAS.](#)
- [Charles A. Kupchan and Peter Trubowitz, 'A China Strategy to Reunite America's Allies', 2021.](#)
- [The Longer Telegram: Toward a new American China Strategy', \*The Atlantic Council\*, 2021.](#)

## ***Part III: Strategic Challenges and Decisions***

Part III tests and challenges your strategic thinking by considering how “surrogate warfare” is changing strategy and raising critical strategic choices for great powers in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Part III also tests and challenges your strategic thinking by engaging in a strategic crisis simulation and horizon scanning the future challenges of great power strategy.

### **12. Surrogate Warfare: Is Strategy still a ‘Battle of Wills’?**

Michelle Foucault defined strategy as a ‘battle of wills’, but to what extent is this still a valid definition in a context where great powers are increasingly targeting populations as “unwilling” surrogates of powerful narrative discourses in information warfare?

#### Class questions

- To what extent will surrogate warfare become the form conflict between great powers in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?
- In what specific ways is the rise of surrogate warfare changing the future of strategy?

#### Essential reading

- [Andreas Krieg and Jean-Marc Rickli, ‘Surrogate Warfare: The Art of War in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’, \*Defence Studies\*, 18:2 \(2018\), pp. 113-130.](#)
- [Thomas Weldman, ‘Strategic Narratives and US Surrogate Warfare’, \*Survival: Global Politics and Strategy\*, 61:1 \(2019\), pp. 161-178.](#)

#### Further optional reading

- [Andreas Krieg and Jean-Marc Rickli \*Surrogate Warfare: The Transformation of War in the Twenty-First Century\*](#)
- [Lucas Kello \*The Virtual Weapon and International Order\*](#)
- [Steven Lukes, ‘Power and the Battle for Hearts and Minds’, \*Millennium: Journal of International Studies\*, 2005.](#)

- [Julian Reid, 'Foucault on Clausewitz: Conceptualizing the Relationship Between War and Power', \*Alternatives: Global, Local, Political\*, 28:1 \(2003\), pp. 1-28.](#)

### 13. Strategic Crisis Simulation (*Participation 10%*)

*\*Instructions will be provided separately in advance and crucial information about the crisis will be revealed on the day.*

### 14. Conclusion: The Future of Great Power Strategy (*EU Strategy Paper Due, 50%*)

The global order that emerges in the *medium-to-long-term* depends on what great power strategies are adopted and how the equation of their selection and contest is resolved in the *near-term*.

Class questions

- What kind of global order is the combination of great power strategies producing in the near-term, and with what effects for global order in the medium to long-term?

*\*Readings TBC.*