Course Objective:

Great power politics is once again at the forefront of international politics. This course explores the drivers and dynamics of great power politics, which concerns the political relations between the most powerful states in international politics. The first part of the course seeks a general theoretical understanding of the sources and patterns of great power politics. The second part of the course examines how factors such as ideology, domestic politics, geography, alliances, global economics, military capabilities, and grand strategy influence great power politics. The third part of the course explores the nature and stakes of great power politics in the twenty-first century, with respect to a growing spectrum of existential risks to humanity.

Student Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students should:

• Understand some of the leading theories, concepts, and debates about why and how great powers compete for power and status in international politics;
• Apply theories and concepts of the sources and dynamics of great power politics to the emerging U.S.-China rivalry;
• Think strategically about the opportunities and challenges facing great powers in their political, economic, and security relations with other states;
• Analyze the implications of great power politics for some of the biggest threats to humanity in the twenty-first century, such as nuclear weapons, climate change, and artificial intelligence.

Course Materials:

No textbooks or book purchases are necessary for this course. All reading material should be available to students through the university’s online Library database (https://search.library.utoronto.ca/index). Any readings that are not accessible online — especially book chapters — will be made available by the instructor through the course website on Quercus.

Prerequisites:

Prerequisites are strictly checked and enforced and must be completed before taking a course. By taking this course you acknowledge that you will be removed from the course at any time if you do not meet all requirements set by the Department of Political Science. Further information can be found in the 2020-2021 Courses Calendar https://fas.calendar.utoronto.ca/.

Policies, Rules and Expectations:

Technology: This course is designed for online-delivery, meaning that students will attend class virtually. Students will require access to a computer and the Internet to attend class and to complete all assignments and tests. The course will make use of various online platforms and resources, including Quercus, Outlook, Zoom, Slack, and Youtube. Students will also require access to the university’s online Library database in order to gain access to the course readings (https://onesearch.library.utoronto.ca/research/articles-databases).

Communication: If students have specific questions or concerns about the course material or their coursework, they should direct them to the Instructor at n.sears@mail.utoronto.ca. The Instructor will aim to respond to emails within 48 hours. The instructor will not respond to emails on weekends.
Office Hours: If students have questions or concerns that require deeper discussion, this should be reserved for the Instructor’s office hours. Office hours will be held online via Zoom and should be scheduled ahead of time by emailing the Instructor.

Attendance and Participation: Students are expected to attend classes virtually and participate actively in class discussions and activities.

Workload: This course has a heavy reading requirement: roughly 3 journal articles/books chapters per class session. Students should reserve at least 8–10 hours per week for class preparation, in addition to class time and assignments.

Assignments:

Argumentative Essay/Mid-Term
Value: 25%
Due date: July 19th at 11:59pm (after Session 5).
Description: Students write an essay that responds to the following question: Will China’s rise to great power status be peaceful? Students should develop an original argument based on their comprehension and application of various theories and concepts of great power politics to the contemporary case of the rise of China. The paper should be no more than 3,000 words (+/- 300), including notes and bibliography. Students must include citations/references where appropriate, following a recognized citation style. This assignment assesses students primarily on their comprehension and application of theory, and is based on the course materials from Sessions 1 through 5.

Strategic Policy Memorandum
Value: 20%
Due date: July 28th at 11:59 PM (after Session 8)
Description: In groups, students produce a strategic policy memorandum that critically analyzes the strategic situation of a great/major power and makes a set of policy recommendations to the government. This strategic policy memorandum should consider, inter alia, (1) the goals or objectives of foreign policy; (2) the means or capabilities of national power; and (3) the threats or constraints from other states. The memorandum should also analyze at least two distinct approaches to grand strategy and then make the case for one of these in a recommendation to the government. The policy memorandum should be no more than 3,000 words (+/- 300), including notes and references. Students must include citations/references where appropriate, following a recognized
citation style. This assignment assesses students primarily on their analytical and critical thinking skills.

**Seminar Participation/Attendance**  
*Value:* 20%  
*Due date:* Cumulative  
*Description:* Students are expected to attend class and participate actively in class discussions and activities, especially in any discussion or activities following the lecture. Students should be ready to pose or answer questions, and generally contribute to seminar discussions. Students will be evaluated on both the quality and quantity of their participation throughout the semester. During the second unit of the course, students will participate in a multi-session game on the “The Struggle for Power and Peace in Asia-Pacific.” Students will be asked to role-play a particular great/major power in groups. This game will represent half of their seminar participation grade.

**Final Research Paper/Presentation**  
*Value:* 35% (25% for research paper; 10% for recorded presentation)  
*Due Date:* Final research paper due on August 16th at 11:59pm (after Session 12)  
*Description:* Students write a research paper that responds to an original research question on great power politics. The paper should follow the style of an academic paper, and should include an introduction, a literature review, a theoretical framework, empirical analysis, and a conclusion. The introduction should clearly articulate the research question/puzzle and the thesis statement of the paper. The paper should be well-researched, with a minimum of 15 sources, in which the majority should be academic sources (e.g., published journal articles or books). Students must include citations/references where appropriate, following any recognized citation style. The length of the paper should be no more than 4,000 words (+/- 400), including notes and references. The paper will be evaluated on the basis of four criteria: knowledge and research; comprehension and application of theory; critical thinking and analysis; and writing and communication. Then, students will submit a recorded video presentation of the paper (between 8-10 minutes), within 2 days of the due date of their final paper (August 18th at 11:59pm). Students are encouraged to use Powerpoint or some other visual aid for their presentation.

**Missed/Late Assignments:**  
Late assignments will be subject to a late penalty of 5% per day (including weekends) of the total marks for the assignment. Assignments submitted five calendar days beyond the due date will be assigned a grade of zero. Assignments handed in AFTER the
work has been returned to the class cannot be marked for credit. Accommodations due to late registration into the course will NOT be approved.

Please note that an ACORN self-declaration does NOT constitute adequate documentation. You cannot self-declare yourself too sick to work on the essay.

**Missed Tests:**

Students who miss a term test will be assigned a grade of zero for that test unless they are granted special consideration. If the term test/midterm was missed for reasons entirely beyond the student’s control, a written request for special consideration must be submitted to the instructor within 3 days of the missed test. This request must explain the reason for missing the test and include appropriate documentation.

A student whose explanation is accepted by the instructor may be granted a makeup test. The instructor will assign the date(s) for makeup tests, administer them, evenings and Saturdays included, and will inform the students. If the student is granted permission to take a makeup test and misses it, they will be assigned a grade of zero for the test.

**Absence Declaration:**

The University of Toronto has created an “Absence Declaration” tool for students to record any absence from academic work, whether for medical or non-medical reasons. Students should complete the Absence Declaration anytime they are absent from academic work.

Students may add up to 14 consecutive days for which they are absent and should record each day of absence from the beginning until the day before returning to classes. This Absence Declaration tool will help the university to make decisions about academic accommodations.

For more information, see: [https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/covid19-artsci-student-faqs#fw2021-absence-declaration-accordion-2](https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/covid19-artsci-student-faqs#fw2021-absence-declaration-accordion-2).

**Plagiarism:**

Plagiarism is a serious academic offence with a severe penalty. It is essential for students to inform themselves about what constitutes plagiarism and the penalties. Ignorance of the rules against plagiarism is not a defense. Students must at all times adhere to the
rules and norms of proper citations and references. Cases of suspected plagiarism will be reported to the Department of Political Science.

For more information on what constitutes as plagiarism and how to avoid it:

“How to Use Sources and Avoid Plagiarism”: http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize

Other Advisory Material available at: http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources

Turnitin.com

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to Turnitin.com for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University’s use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com web site.

Course Overview:

Unit I: Great Power Politics: Theories, Concepts and Debates

Session 1 (July 5th) — Deja Vu? “Great Powers” and “Great Power Politics” in International Relations

Session 2 (July 7th) — The Sources and Dynamics of Great Power Politics: Why Do Great Powers Compete for Power?

Session 3 (July 12th) — Great Power War & Peace: Why Do(n’t) Great Powers Fight?

Session 4 (July 14th) — Great Powers and International Orders: Balance-of-Power, Hegemony, and Power Transitions

Session 5 (July 19th) — The Rise of China

Unit II: The Great Powers in the Twenty-First Century: The United States and China in Comparison

Session 6 (July 21st) — Grand Strategy

Session 7 (July 26th) — Military Power, Arms Races, and the Use of Force

Session 8 (July 28th) — Geography, Alliances, and (Non-)Alignment
Session 9 (August 4th) — Ideology, Identity, and Domestic Politics

Session 10 (August 9th) — Great Powers, Economic Statecraft, and the Global Economy

Unit III: Great Power Politics and Existential Risk

Session 11 (August 11th) — Great Power Politics and Nuclear Weapons

Session 12 (August 16th) — Great Powers Politics and the “Age of Existential Threats”

Course Outline: Themes & Readings

Session 1: Deja Vu? “Great Powers” and “Great Power Politics” in International Relations

Key Concepts: Great Powers; Power; Interest; Capabilities; Authority; Status; Prestige; Ranking; International System; Thucydides

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


Seminar Question: Is it still relevant for International Relations students to study Thucydides?

Case: N/A

Class Activities: Game on great power politics and war / Discussion of Thucydides / Explanation of course and syllabus.

Session 2: The Sources and Dynamics of Great Power Politics: Why Do Great Powers Compete for Power?

Key Concepts: Great Power Politics; Realism; Realpolitik; International Anarchy; International Society; Great Power Management

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


Seminar Question: What is “great power politics”? Why do great powers compete for power and status in international politics?

Case: N/A

Class Activities: Lecture/seminar discussion.

Session 3: Great Power War & Peace: Why Do(n’t) Great Powers Fight?

Key Concepts: Human Nature; International Anarchy; Security Dilemma; Hegemonic War; Democratic Peace; Economic Interdependence; International Institutions; Cooperative security

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


Seminar Question: Why do(n’t) great powers fight? What factor best explains the “long peace” between the great powers since 1945?

Case: The Cold War and the “Long Peace”

Class Activities: Lecture/seminar discussion.

Session 4: Great Powers and International Orders: Balance-of-Power, Hegemony, and Power Transitions

Key Concepts: Anarchy; Polarity; Distribution-of-Capabilities; Balance-of-Power; Balance-of-Threats; Balancing; Bandwagoning; Hierarchy; Hegemony; Hegemonic Cycles; Differential Growth; Power Transitions

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


**Cases:** European balance-of-power; U.S. hegemony
Class Activities: Lecture/seminar discussion.

Session 5: The Rise of China

Key Concepts: The Rise of China

Required Readings:

Recommended Readings:


**Seminar Question:** Will China’s rise to great power status be peaceful?

**Case:** The Rise of China

**Class Activities:** Lecture/seminar discussion.

**Session 6: Grand Strategy**

**Key Concepts:** Grand Strategy; Isolationism; Offshore Balancing; Retrenchment; Preponderance; Primacy; Liberal Hegemony; Reassurance; Reform; Resistance; Counter-Hegemony

**Required Readings:**

**Recommended Readings:**


**Seminar Questions:** What is grand strategy? What are the optimal grand strategies for the United States and China?

**Cases:** U.S. grand strategy; Chinese grand strategy

**Class Activities:** Lecture/seminar discussion; Game: “The Struggle for Power and Peace in East Asia”.

**Session 7: Military Power, Arms Races, and the Use of Force**

**Key Concepts:** Military Power; Arms Races; Security Dilemma; Offense-Defense Balance; Military Technical Revolutions; Command-of-the-Commons; China’s Military Modernization; Anti-Access/Areal-Denial (A2/AD)

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


**Seminar Question:**

**Cases:** U.S. military power; Chinese military power

**Class Activities:** Lecture/seminar discussion; Game: “The Struggle for Power and Peace in East Asia”.

**Session 8: Geography, Alliances, and (Non-)Alignment**

**Key Concepts:** Regional Systems; Geography; Heartland; Rimland; Land Power; Sea Power; Alliances; Hedging; (Non-)Alignment; Spheres-of-Influence; Great Power Intervention; Proxy Wars; Client Regimes

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


**Seminar Question:** How does geography shape the patterns of alignment across the Asia Pacific?

**Case:** East Asia/Asia Pacific

**Class Activities:** Students analyze the strategic geography and patterns of alignment in East Asia and Asia Pacific. Game: “The Struggle for Power and Peace in East Asia”.

**Session 9: Ideology, Identity, and Domestic Politics**

**Key Concepts:** Ideology; Ideological competition; Ideological distance; Hegemonic Shocks; Second-Image Reversed; Regime Type; Populism; Democracy; Autocracy

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


**Seminar Question:** What are the contours of contemporary ideological competition between the great powers? Does great power politics threaten liberal democracy?

**Case:** The Cold War; The Chinese Communist Party

**Class Activities:** Lecture/seminar discussion; Game: “The Struggle for Power and Peace in East Asia”.

**Session 10: Great Powers, Economic Statecraft, and the Global Economy**

**Key Concepts:** Global Economy; Geoeconomics; Hegemonic Stability Theory; Economic Interdependence; Weaponized Interdependence; Economic Nationalism; Protectionism; Mercantilism; Core-Periphery; Decoupling; Trade War

**Readings:**


**Seminar Question:** Can global economic interdependence withstand the resurgence of great power politics, or is economic nationalism and decoupling the inevitable outcome of the U.S.-China rivalry?

**Case:** The U.S.-China Trade War

**Class Activities:** Lecture/seminar discussion; Game: “The Struggle for Power and Peace in East Asia”.
Session 11: Great Power Politics and Nuclear Weapons

Key Concepts: The Nuclear Revolution; Deterrence; Arms Control; Nuclear Safety; Nuclear Winter; Nuclear Taboo

Requiring Readings:

Recommended Readings:
Seminar Question: Are nuclear weapons a source of international peace and security?

Cases: The Cuban Missile Crisis; The U.S.-North Korean Crisis

Class Activities: Lecture/seminar discussion.

Session 12: Great Power Politics and the “Age of Existential Threats”

Key Concepts: Existential Threats; Anthropocene; Climate Change; Tipping Points; Hothouse Earth; Geoengineering; Climate Governance; Emerging Technologies; Technological Disruption; Technological Loss-of-Control; Vulnerable World Hypothesis; Great Power Responsibility

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


**Seminar Question:** How does great power politics exacerbate/ameliorate the existential risks facing humanity?

**Case:** Climate Change; Artificial Intelligence

**Class Activities:** Lecture/seminar discussion.