INTRODUCTION TO GEOPOLITICS

Geography 318
Spring 2017
TR 2:30 – 3:45, 444 Science Hall
Office Hours: TR 11-12, or by appointment

Professor Robert Kaiser
430 Science Hall
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Course Outline

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the main concepts and research themes in contemporary geopolitics. As one of the primary perspectives within the field of political geography, geopolitics represents a broad engagement with the interactive relationships between power and place, and the construction, contestation and reconfiguration of political spaces that result. During the semester we will examine the formation of geopolitical images of the world, where these images come from, and how they have shaped our thinking and politics over time. Following an introduction to traditional and critical approaches to geopolitics, we will examine the modern history of global geopolitics from the turn of the 20th century to the present day. Beginning with imperial geopolitics and especially Mackinder’s heartland thesis, and continuing with cold war and post-cold war geopolitics, we will critically analyze the ways that academics, politicians and popular sources such as news media and film have shaped our understanding of the geopolitical world. We will end the semester with a critical analysis of emergent geopolitical understandings of the post-9/11 world, including the Bush and Obama presidencies and the emergent geopolitics under Trump.

Please note that because we will be critically analyzing contemporary geopolitics as events unfold during the semester, the class schedule and readings are only tentative, and may change rather dramatically as events unfold.

This class is Practice-Based! We will be critically analyzing articles, speeches, and movies throughout the semester in class. This means that ATTENDANCE IS VITAL!!!

Please Note: I will distribute copies of my powerpoint slides via Learn@UW after lecture. However, the slides only convey some of the content from the lecture, and this is especially true for our class because we will be doing a good
deal of small-group in-class work and discussion. If you must miss a class, it is your responsibility to make up for the content missed.

I am always open to feedback, or calls for assistance or advice. Please come to my office hours or make arrangements to meet in my office if there is anything about the course you would like to discuss.

Course Requirements and Objectives

You are required to complete class readings prior to the day for which they are assigned, and to come to class prepared to discuss the topic of the day. In addition to the required readings (see the course schedule below), you are required to follow the international news on a daily basis, and we will begin most class periods with a review of the relevant news of the day.

By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

- Define and distinguish between traditional and critical approaches to geopolitics
- Discuss the main elements of the geopolitical imagination that shape our understanding of the world and our place in it
- Describe, provide examples of, and critically analyze the formal, practical, and popular geopolitics that interact to produce our geopolitical understandings of the world
- Trace the continuities and discontinuities of US geopolitics across imperial, cold war, post-cold war, and post 9/11 eras.

Graduate students: Graduate students who take this course will be assessed separately from undergraduate students (essays, exams and common work). In addition, extra work will be required. Please see Professor Kaiser for details.

Required Readings

John Agnew, Geopolitics: Re-Visioning World Politics, 2nd ed. (London and NY: Routledge, 2003). This book can be found online at Amazon, and there is an electronic version as well as hard copies.
Recommended: J Dittmer and J Sharp, eds. 2014. *Geopolitics: An Introductory Reader*. I have included selected readings from this on the content pages of our learn@UW site, but it is also a valuable resource for the course.

Articles will be assigned throughout the semester, and will be available to you on the weekly content pages using Learn@UW.

Current Affairs:

It is a requirement of this course that you do at least one of the following:

(a) Watch the News Hour or BBC world news on PBS. The News Hour is on M-F at 6:00 pm. They have also begun a weekend program.

(b) Read a newspaper with a strong international (versus US) focus on a daily basis. My first recommendation is the *International Herald Tribune* (http://www.iht.com) or the *New York Times* (http://www.nytimes.com), but you can also read BBC online, *Al Jazeera*, or other daily international news sources.

(c) Listen to NPR’s *All Things Considered* (morning or afternoon edition) – FM 88.7, 5-7, 7-9, or 4-6 – they repeat content, so mainly listening for an hour a day should be sufficient.

Current events will be discussed in the context of course concepts and themes throughout the semester, as an applied complement to more general readings, and will be used for analytical essays and in exams.

Grading

Your final grade for the class is based on a combination of 2 examinations (midterm and final), 2 papers and class participation. The percentage distribution is as follows:

- **Exams:** 2 @ 20%  40%
- **Analytical Papers:** 2 @ 15%  30%
- **Class Participation:** 30%
Note: late papers will suffer a third of a letter grade reduction per day unless unavoidable circumstances arise. In the case of illness, family emergency or other similar circumstance, please contact me as soon as possible, preferably before an assignment is due. Please also be aware that if you miss lecture for any reason, you are responsible for the material covered. Please also note that the UW policy on academic honesty states that students can be expelled for one case of cheating or plagiarism. If you are unclear as to what constitutes cheating and/or plagiarism, please see me.

Class Participation will consist of your involvement in small group and general class discussions (20%), as well as your contributions to the weekly discussion page at our learn@UW site (10%).

**Detailed Schedule**

**Week 1 (1/17, 1/19) Introduction to Geopolitics**

Readings: Agnew, chapter 1.
President Obama, 1/10 Farewell Address (Whitehouse.gov)


**Week 2 (1/24, 1/26) Visualizing Global Space**

**Geopolitical Images and Their Deconstruction**

Reading: Agnew, chapter 2.
Donald Trump, *Inaugural Address* (Whitehouse.gov)

Note: Analytical Paper One assigned and discussed in class, 1/28.

**Week 3 (1/31, 2/2) Mapping Time onto Space**

Reading: Agnew, chapter 3.
Video: *Star Trek*, “A Private Little War” (1968)

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<th>Week 4 (2/7, 2/9)</th>
<th>A World of Territorial Nations and States</th>
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<td>Readings:</td>
<td>Agnew, chapter 4.</td>
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<td>Jason Dittmer, “America is safe while its boys and girls believe in its creeds! Captain America and American identity prior to World War 2.” Excerpt from <em>Geopolitics: An Introductory Reader</em>, pp. 80-88.</td>
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<th>Week 5 (2/14, 2/16)</th>
<th>Pursuit/Assertion of Primacy</th>
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<td>Readings:</td>
<td>Agnew, chapter 5.</td>
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<th>Week 6 (2/21, 2/23)</th>
<th>MIDTERM REVIEW AND EXAM</th>
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<th>Week 7 (2/28, 3/2)</th>
<th>Cold War Geopolitics, The Early Years</th>
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<tr>
<td>Readings:</td>
<td>Agnew, chapter 6 (pp 102-113).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Klaus Dodds, “Cold War Geopolitics,” in John Agnew et al. (eds), <em>A Companion to Political Geography</em>. <em>The Truman Doctrine</em>.</td>
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<td><strong>Note:</strong></td>
<td>Analytical Paper One Due in class 3/2.</td>
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<th>Week 8 (3/7, 3/9)</th>
<th>Popular Geopolitics of the First Cold War</th>
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<td>R Jacobs, “‘There are no civilians; we are all at war’: nuclear war</td>
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shelters and survival narratives during the early cold war,”

Videos:  
*Red Nightmare*  
*Dr. Strangelove* (1964)

**Note:** Analytical Paper Two assigned and discussed in class.

**Week 9 (3/14, 3/16)  Critical Geopolitics of the Second Cold War**

Readings:  

Video:  
*Red Dawn*

**MARCH 18-26  SPRING BREAK**

**Week 10 (3/28, 3/30)  Critical Geopolitics of the Post-Cold War**

Readings:  
Agnew, Chapter 7.
Dittmer and Sharp, pp. 169-208.

**Week 11 (4/4, 4/6)  Popular Geopolitics of the Post-Cold War**

Readings:  

Films:  
*Black Hawk Down* (2001)  
*Behind Enemy Lines* (2001)
### Week 12 (4/11, 4/13) Critical Geopolitics after 9/11: The Bush Years

Readings:  
- Dittmer and Sharp, pp. 209-236.  
- President Bush, October 2005 War on Terror speech

### Week 13 (4/18, 4/20) Post 9/11 Critical Geopolitics: The Obama Years

Readings:  
- Other readings TBA

Note: Analytical Paper Two due in discussion section.

### Week 14 (4/25, 4/27) Popular Geopolitics after 9/11

Readings:  

Films:  
- *The Kingdom*  
- *Minority Report*  
- *Captain America 2: The Winter Soldier*

### Week 15 (5/2, 5/4) REVIEW AND SECOND EXAM