

Faculty of Economic, Social and Political Sciences



POLS1317 Geopolitics and the International System

[60h+30h exercises] 10 credits

Teacher(s): Tanguy de Wilde d'Estmael, Claude Roosens
Language: French
Level: First cycle

Aims

This course first introduces the study of international relations.

It aims thereafter, on the one hand, to provide the historical bases essential for understanding the present-day international system and, by examining the facts, to test various theoretical aspects of international relations.

The course will also equip students with the instruments they need for the geopolitical analysis of the international scene, which involves in particular being able to:

1. define geopolitics as a "discipline";
2. explain how space is a factor in international relations;
3. locate geopolitics in the historical development of the international system;
4. explain and criticise pre-1945 geopolitical conceptions;
5. explain the taboo affecting post-1945 geopolitics and the reasons for its reactivation at the end of the twentieth century;
6. establish geological influences on border formation between states;
7. carry out a geopolitical analysis of an international situation;
8. use geopolitical analysis to decipher international crises and conflicts.

Main themes

Taking politics and geopolitics as autonomous subjects, the course examines international activity since 1815, taking into account other economic, ideological and social aspects.

It takes a chronological look at key periods throughout the last 200 or so years to examine in particular the question of international stability and how it has been maintained.

The first part of the course examines the various "systems" which have marked international life. Particular attention is given to the Vienna system, Bismarck's system, collective security, East-West stability, etc. The systems are compared and their similarities and differences underlined.

Students are then taught how to use the instruments of geopolitical analysis, so that they can approach international issues in a different way from that usually adopted within traditional approaches. This involves finding answers to the following questions:

What precisely is geopolitics? Where, when and how did it enter into the field of politico-academic reflection? How did it develop? Why was it not used for a long time after 1945? Why and how did geopolitical thinking undergo something of a renaissance in the last quarter of the twentieth century? How can it be used to understand international conflicts?

Content and teaching methods

The course will examine the different configurations of the international from 1815 to the present day:

- the Congress of Vienna (i.e. the Congress and the conferences) (1815-1870);
- the Bismarkian system (i.e. alliances and counter-alliances) (1875-1890);
- the first type of the "bipolar" system (the Triple Entente) (1895-1917);
- the bipolar system (i.e. the cold war) (1946-1990);
- a new balance (1990-).

Lectures will be accompanied by work involving an analysis based on documents (individual or group research).

The continuation of the course articulates in five sequences, after a general introduction in the concept of geopolitics;

- A brief reminder of the place and the importance which keeps the space as the factor of the contemporary international relations
- An analysis of the concept of ground border in the international order
- A summary of the history of the Geopolitics since the previous history (and especially since the sort of original sin which constitutes German Geopolitik) until the contemporary revival of the geopolitical reflection
- The third part is dedicated to the historic evolution of the geopolitics before 1945. This subdivision concentrates on an analysis of the striking authors (precursors and classical authors)
- The fourth part attempts to understand the resurgence and the new importance of geopolitical and presents the current geopolitical thought appeared after the caesura of 1989
- The last part is the concern the applied geopolitics and begins case studies of contemporary conflicts

Alternation of lectures with projection of visual data and sessions of discussion of readings involving a substantial personal work of the student in the analysis of the supplied documents. Importance of the cartographic support. Insertion of one or two speakers on subjects of current events, as possible

Other information (prerequisite, evaluation (assessment methods), course materials recommended readings, ...)

Prerequisite: Basic historical and geopolitical knowledge (from the French Revolution to the modern day) is necessary, as the course often lays emphasis on the analysis of supposedly known facts (a reading list and links established with other courses are given to address possible shortcomings)

Evaluation: Oral or written examination. There will be a multiple choice question pre-test on the basis of the compulsory reading.

In addition to the obligatory examination, students may also choose to carry out optional work on a question connected with the course but which has not been developed during it.

Course materials: The icampus web page provides additional course materials.

Within the framework of the BAC 3 in Political Science, this course goes together with the seminar on international relations.

With regards to the Master in International Relations, this course provides the foundations for Theories of International Relations, international Organisations and international Negotiations.

Other credits in programs

SPOL13BA Troisième année de bachelier en sciences politiques (10 credits)