

PS369 Critical Geopolitics

Seminar Leader: Boris Vormann

Course Times: Wednesdays and Fridays 14:00-15:30

Office Hours: By appointment

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Course Description

As a field of study, geopolitics examines the spatial dimensions of interstate power relations. Modern thinking about geopolitics emerged at the turn to the 20th century, as the British Empire unraveled and new colonial and hegemonial disputes erupted. After World War II, geopolitics lost much of its analytical lure, due to the fact that the Nazi regime had built many of its political claims on such geostrategic considerations (*Lebensraum*). After the fall of the Iron Curtain, new transportation and communication technologies seemed to make distance and space irrelevant categories for political thinking and action, given the plummeting of transaction costs and globalization processes. Climate change and depleting resources, renationalization tendencies, large-scale infrastructural development projects and resurfacing territorial conflicts have all led to a reinvigoration of geopolitical thinking and practice in the very recent past. What potential futures does this imply for cooperation and for conflict? This course critically engages conceptual and theoretical texts in geopolitics, examines historical examples, and explores three of today's most pertinent geopolitical relationships: China's one-belt-one road initiative, Russia's territorial ambitions, and the reinvention of transatlantic relations.

Requirements

Reading material

- Class Reader (available at the library)
- Books to buy:
 - Dodds, Klaus. 2019. *Geopolitics. A very short introduction*. Third Edition. OUP.
 - Blouet, B. W. 2001. *Geopolitics and Globalization in the Twentieth Century*. Reaktion Books.
 - Kaplan, Robert D. 2013. *The Revenge of Geography*. Random House.

Class preparation

In preparation for class, read the texts thoughtfully and engage with their core argument. Take notes while reading and try to identify questions in advance: Why do the authors argue as they do? How do they raise and substantiate their claims? How does their line of argumentation relate to earlier readings and discussions in class?

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) will not affect the participation grade or require documentation. Every unexcused additional absence from a 90-min session lowers the participation grade by one step (i.e., from B+ to B).

Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assignments, Grade Breakdown and Essay Deadlines

Oral

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| • Classroom Participation (2*15%) | 30% (of overall grade) |
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This seminar involves thoughtful and active participation in class discussions, reflections on current themes, and working groups. The classroom is a protected space and you should feel free to voice your arguments and comments. Please do not hesitate to address the seminar leader if you feel that this is not the case.

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| • Case Presentation | 20% |
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Each student (or group of two) will present a case study that highlights a particular case of geopolitical conflict or geostrategic developments for one of the subjects in weeks 9-11. During the workshop, the short presentation component should be no longer than 15-20 minutes and should be interactive, engaging, and analytically insightful. Students in charge of a workshop are also expected to develop questions and a deeper-going expertise on the subject to be able and guide the ensuing discussion. The workshop is supposed to be no longer than 45 minutes.

Written

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| • 10 Response Papers (each ~500 word; 10*5%) | 50% |
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Each student is required to write 10 response papers (1.5-spaced, 12 pt., Times New Roman). I expect an analysis that embeds the reading in earlier class discussions, and the articulation of one central synthetic question that engages the issues and debates addressed in the reading as a starting point for broader discussion.

- Response papers need to be submitted per email by the beginning of the respective session. **Late submissions will not be accepted!**
- Indicate your name, the number of the response paper, and the date of submission in the header of the document.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Schedule

Week
Beginning

Wednesday

Friday

I. Introduction: Concepts and Theories

1
Jan 30

What is Geopolitics?
Dodds, Geopolitics, Chapter 1
Dittmer & Sharp, Intro

Approaches and Traditions
Agnew, Geopolitics, Intro
Atkinson & Dodds, Geopolitical Traditions

1 Response
Paper

2
Feb 6

Critiques of Geopolitics
Said, Orientalism
Dowler & Sharp, A Feminist Geopolitics
Brenner, What is critical urban theory?

Themes and Subfields
Dodds, Geopolitics, Chs. 2-6

II. Historical Geopolitics

States and Empires

3
Feb 13

Spaces of Empire
Maier, Once Within Borders, Ch. 1

The Rise of the State System
Maier, Once Within Borders, Ch. 2
Wallerstein, The Rise of the State System

2 Response
Papers

4
Feb 20

Roots of European Geopolitics
Heffernan, Fin du Siècle, Fin du Monde?

Imperial Logics
Dittmer, Intro to Part One
Excerpts by Mahan (1890), MacKinder
(1904), Haushofer (1942)

Cold War

5
Feb 27

Transitioning into the 20th Century
Blouet, Geopolitics & Globalization, Intro,
Chs. 1-3

The Cold War
Blouet, Geopolitics & Globalization, Ch. 4
Isiah Bowman, Geography versus
Geopolitics (1942)

2 Response
Papers

6
Mar 6

Struggling for the World
Blouet, Geopolitics & Glob., Chs. 5-7
Kennan, The Sources of Soviet Conduct
(1947)
Eisenhower, The Domino Theory Principle
(1954)

Géohistoire
Lacoste, An Illustration of Geographical
Warfare (1973)
Hepple, Géopolitiques de Gauche

Post-Cold War

7 Mar 13	Rise of the Geoeconomic Blouet, Geopolitics & Global., Ch. 8 (2001) Cohen, Geopolitics of the World System, Intro and Ch. 3 (2002)	Rethinking Geopolitics Cowen & Smith, After Geopolitics? (2009)	2 Response Papers
8 Mar 20	The Return of Geopolitics? Ikenberry, The Illusion of Geopolitics (2014) Mead, The Return of Geopolitics (2014)	Recapitulation I Kaplan, Revenge of Geography, Chapters 1-4 (2012)	
9 Mar 27	Recapitulation II Kaplan, Revenge of Geography Chapters 5-8 (2012)	Selecting Case Studies Kaplan, Revenge of Geography, Read Part II to select cases	

Spring Break (Apr. 3-7)

III. Critical Geopolitics: Contemporary Cases and Debates

Case Study Research and Presentations

9 Mar 27	Research	Research
10 Apr 10	Research	Presentations
11 Apr 17	Presentations	Presentations

New spaces, perspectives and debates

12 Apr 24	Sustaining Populations Cowen, watch Logistics of Life and Death Oakes, The Belt and Road as method	Geopolitics of Health Cole & Dodds, Unhealthy Geopolitics?	3 Response Papers
13 May 1	Climate Security Simon Dalby, Interview Dodds, Geopolitics and Ice Humanities	Geopolitics of Outer Space Klinger, Critical Geopolitics of Outer Space //Environmental Geopolitics and Outer Space	
14 May 8	New Feminist Perspectives Sharp, Materials, forensics and feminist geopolitics Jackman and Brickel, 'Everyday droning'	Conclusions	