International Relations is often regarded as a field disconnected from our daily existence—a field dominated by diplomats, politicians and concerned with events that do not affect the common man. However, events in the recent past ranging from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to the on-going global economic crisis, and the gradual expansion of popular opposition to political oppression and social inequality have, in a sense, brought international relations home. These events make it quite evident that the politics of international relations both links the fates of people across borders, and is fundamentally linked to the promises and pitfalls of our daily lives, more broadly understood. As a new generation comes to grips with the reality of wars and recessions without seeming ends, it is not surprising that there has been a renewed interest in the field of international politics, especially in the United States. The purpose of this course is to use this renewed interest and the growing sense of urgency as a starting point to make sense of the world that we are living in. That this happens to be a world where our fates are intertwined, where interventions are a fact of political and economic life, is stating the obvious. But, what is the nature of these interventions? Do they help us arrive at a more equal and just global order? Is international politics merely a play for power? Can, and for that matter, should it be altered, and if so, on what basis and for what purpose? Rather than accept what one finds in mainstream media accounts and declarations by the political elites at face value, this course aims to help you arrive at a more nuanced and critical understanding of these questions. It does so by making you familiar with alternative approaches to international politics, compelling you to take seriously analyses about the origins and nature of the modern world order, and highlighting the enduring relevance of historical and socio-political struggles for any analyses of contemporary issues.

The course will address many of the issues that dominate discussions of international politics today, issues that you are all familiar with at some level—debates surrounding the question of imperialism in general, and American empire in particular; the politics of humanitarian intervention; and the logic of the current global economic crisis. However, rather than starting with the assumption that the politics surrounding these issues are self-evident, we will approach each question systematically, working through the underlying theoretical and normative commitments that characterize competing world-views.

Throughout this course, you will be exposed to strong, critical and competing analyses of crucially important issues in international politics. Given the contemporaneous nature of these issues, it is expected that most of you (if not all) will come in with opinions about the state of the world. While you are encouraged to give voice to those opinions, you will be
expected to go beyond that – to understand the implicit assumptions that have shaped your world-views, to engage with competing analyses and develop your own critical perspective on international politics.

**Reading for this course:**

This is a book-centric course. The books that you will be reading for class have been chosen with the aim of providing you access to competing theoretical perspectives as well as some of the more provocative debates in international politics. Each of the books covers issues that have been the subject of intense scrutiny in recent years. However, while some have been published very recently (such as the books by Bacevich, Bass, and Prashad) and as such, very self-consciously address events that have taken place in the past decade, the other books you have been assigned are qualitatively different. Lenin’s *Imperialism* and to a more limited extent, Said’s *Covering Islam* have withstood the test of time. The former, first published nearly a century ago provides one of the most incisive analyses of the politics of the global economy. The latter, first published in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution of 1979, engages with questions about culture and politics that continue to inform the on-going “war on terror.” Regardless of the difference in provenance or viewpoints, what is common to all the books chosen for the class is the fact that each of them, in their own way, take seriously the historical underpinnings of the contemporary international system.

The required books, available at KB Books, are:


In general, keep the following questions in mind while reading for class: What is the *main point* of the chapter or article? What are the *underlying assumptions*? What are the normative and political *implications* of the argument? What are some possible *counter-arguments*? In what ways (if at all) has the chapter or article changed your thinking?

**Class Participation and attendance:**

You are expected to have done the readings for class and participate in informal (or formal, as the case might be) class discussions. This will determine 10% of you grade. A good grade in participation is contingent on BOTH regular attendance AND consistent contributions to class discussions. While I might not take attendance in every class, absences will be noted and will affect your grade. Although you are expected to come to every class, over the course of a semester unforeseen events will prevent some, if not most of you from having a perfect attendance record. For this reason, missing two classes will not affect the attendance part
your grade. Missing more than two will, however, result in grade penalties. Depending on the number of absences these penalties will be as drastic as receiving no credit whatsoever for attendance and participation, or failing the course altogether. Please note that based on this policy there are no “excused” or “unexcused” absences. If, however, an emergency situation arises during the semester that will make it impossible for you to attend the course for a substantial amount of time (several weeks), it is essential that you contact me.

Please note that the lectures and the readings, while complementary may not necessarily cover exactly the same ground. Therefore, missing classes would imply missing valuable class material that might appear on your exam. In addition, you also run the risk of missing a pop quiz.

One of the most important elements of any class is the input offered by the students. It is expected that you listen carefully and courteously to the comments made by your classmates, and participate actively in the class by adding your own comments and questions. To facilitate this process, use of cell-phones or laptops is not permitted in the classroom. Cell-phone usage during class hours will lead to grade penalties. It is particularly important that you refrain from using cell-phones, headsets, or any electronic device at any point during the exam. Since it is not possible for me to determine exactly what the actual purpose of any such activity might be – for example, a quick glance at your smart-phone, or using headsets while you write – the use of any electronic device, however fleeting and for whatever real or alleged purpose will constitute cheating and result in automatic failure for the course.

If you have any concerns, do not hesitate to bring them to me.

**Grading and Assignments:**

Throughout the semester, there will be an unspecified number of pop-quizzes that will account for 10% of your total grade. Pop quizzes can be handed out at the beginning of any given class period and will pertain only to the readings assigned for that particular class. For this reason, it is important that you be punctual. There will be no make-up pop-quizzes. However, your chances of getting full credit will not be harmed if you miss one quiz only. If you take all the quizzes that are handed out during the semester, your lowest scoring test will be discounted. Please note that if you have several tests with the same low score, the rule will still apply – only one test will be excused.

There will two in-class examinations for the course – a mid-term on **February 26th** and a second one on **March 28th**.

**The details for the simulation and the final analytical paper will be discussed after the Spring break.**

The letter grade standards for the class are based on those described in the SDSU General Catalog (2007-2008): A (for outstanding achievement); B (for praiseworthy performance,
definitely above average); C (average, awarded for satisfactory performance); D (minimally passing); F (failing)

The assignments for the class and their respective weight will be as follows:

- Class participation – 10%
- Pop-Quizzes – 10%
- Mid-Term I (in-class), February 26th – 20%
- Mid-Term II (in-class), March 28th – 20%
- In-Class Simulation – 10%
- Final Analytical paper, Due May 9th – 30%

Due dates will be strictly observed, unless there are documented medical emergencies or official exceptions granted by San Diego State University, in which case you will need someone in the office to directly contact me.

Cheating or Plagiarism of any sort will result in automatic failure for the course and be reported to the University.

**Schedule of Readings**

January 17 – Introduction

**I. Power, politics and the nature of an interventionist world order**

[A] Understanding the Realist World:

January 22 –

January 24 –
- Bacevich, *The Limits of Power*, pp. 28-66

January 29 –
- Bacevich, *The Limits of Power*, pp. 67-123

[B] The Liberal Path: The power of humanitarianism

January 31 –

February 5 –
- Bass, *Freedom’s Battle*, pp. 51-87, 100-110
February 7 –
  • Bass, *Freedom’s Battle*, pp. 117-122, 143-151 (skim), 341-382

[C] The social construction of reality: Cultures of power

February 12 –
  • Said, *Covering Islam*, Introduction, Chapter One, pp. xlix – xlx, pp. 3-36

February 14 –
  • Said, *Covering Islam*, Chapter Two (Parts I, II and III), pp. 81-122

February 19 –
  • Said, *Covering Islam*, Chapter Three (Part II), pp. 162-173

February 21 – Mid-term I

II. The making and un-making of the modern world

[A] The politics of the global economy: Marxism and International Relations

February 26 –
  • Lenin, *Imperialism: The highest stage of capitalism*, pp. 7-67

February 28 –
  • Lenin, *Imperialism: The highest stage of capitalism*, pp. 68-128

March 5 –

[B] Imperial orders, past...

March 7 –

March 12–
  • Prashad, *The Darker Nations*, pp. 31-74
  • “Freedom Now” (Documentary)

March 14 –
  • Prashad, *The Darker Nations*, pp. 95-104, 119-133
March 19 –
• Prashad, *The Darker Nations*, pp. 176-203

March 21 –
• Prashad, *The Darker Nations*, pp. 207-244, 245-259

March 26 –
• Prashad, *The Darker Nations*, pp. 276-282

March 28 – Mid-term II

***************************** SPRING BREAK*******************************

[C] Imperial orders, present?

April 9 –
• Movie: *The Battle of Algiers*, Part I

April 11 –
• Movie: *The Battle of Algiers*, (concluded)

April 16 – New threats and new responsibilities: Iraq, Afghanistan and perils of world order
• Bacevich, *The Limits of Power*, pp. 125-169
April 18 – Re-visiting the responsibility to protect: Libya and the new humanitarian order

- Simon Jenkins, “A history of folly, from the Trojan horse to Afghanistan,” http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2010/jul/27/folly-war-wikileaks-afghanistan


April 23, 25 – Simulation Preparation

April 20, May 2 – Simulation

May 7 – Peer Review and Wrap-up

May 9th – Final paper due