

# Strategic Thinking in Foreign and Security Policy

## *Syllabus*

Instructor: András Szalai, PhD  
Email: [andras.szalai.phd@gmail.com](mailto:andras.szalai.phd@gmail.com)  
[szalaia@ceu.edu](mailto:szalaia@ceu.edu)

### **Course outline**

---

This course focuses on the different aspects of strategic thinking in foreign and security policy. Just like in a game of chess, the essence of strategy-making is to achieve one's goals, but doing so requires decisions that take into account how other players will act as well. Strategic thinking, therefore, requires a clear understanding of one's own preferences, capabilities, and constraints; but also those of one's allies, adversaries, and other important parties.

Strategy is a rich field with a long history, and due to its limitations, the course can only offer an introduction into key problems and questions. On the one hand, this course focuses on important aspects of strategic thinking from a theoretical perspective, such as the structure of strategic environments, the security dilemma, credibility, geopolitics, hegemony, the role of culture etc. In addition, building on this general theoretical basis, the course addresses a series of historical crises in order to better understand the decision-making involved within. These crises include the Peloponnesian War, the Cold War, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Iraq Wars, and the international politics of humanitarian intervention. These diverse cases provide a series of different strategic environments and highlight both common and different aspects of strategic thinking that decisionmaker have been, and are now facing.

### **Course format**

---

In this reading seminar, students are expected to form their own opinions about the texts critically, and share those through active participation in class. For each 90 or 180 minute session, there will be one or two mandatory texts that everyone has to read. Seminar discussion will be structured around a short presentation of one of the texts, in which students will summarize and evaluate the reading, while linking it to the topic in question. Seminar discussion therefore depends on serious preparation: it is crucial that students do all of the reading required and come to the seminar prepared to take part in the discussion. It is also essential that presenters offer a clear overview of their text, and provide questions for discussion. Crucially, the course is not about right and wrong answers, but about questions and ideas that students share.

## Requirements

---

**Group presentation (35%):** to facilitate class discussion, groups of approx. 3 students are required to give a 10 minute oral presentation based on one of the readings of that session. The presentation introduces the main points of the text, and contextualizes those based on prior readings and that session's topic. **Students are required to prepare questions for class discussion.**

**Final essay (65%):** students are required to submit a 1500 word essay in a topic previously approved by the instructor. Potential essay topics will be provided by the end of the course, but students can of course come up with their own topic (these have to be approved by the instructor!).

## Topics and Readings for the Course

---

MAY 4<sup>TH</sup>

**1. Introduction: What is Strategy? (May 4<sup>th</sup>, 13.45-15.15)**

- a. Williamson Murray and Mark Grimsley, 'Introduction: On Strategy', in Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox and Alvin Bernstein, eds., *The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States, and War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), chapter 1, pp. 1-23. → ONLY READ THE FIRST CHAPTER!

**2. Strategic Thinking from a Historical Perspective (May 4<sup>th</sup>, 15.30-17.30 & 17.15-18.15)**

- a. Thucydides, Melian dialogue
- b. Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin, 2011). Ch. 1: "The Singularity of China," esp. "Chinese Realpolitik and Sun Tzu's Art of War," pp. 22-32. → ONLY READ SELECTED PASSAGES!
- c. Bernard Brodie, 'The Continuing Relevance of On War', pp. 50-65. In Karl von Clausewitz: *On War*. → ONLY READ THE BRODIE PIECE!

MAY 5<sup>TH</sup>

**3. Beliefs and Fear in Strategy-Making: The Security Dilemma (May 5<sup>th</sup>, 9.00-10.30 & 10.45-12.15)**

- a. Glenn Snyder, "The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics," *World Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (July 1984), pp. 461-477.

**4. The Cold War, Hegemony, and Nuclear weapons (May 5<sup>th</sup>, 14.00-15.30)**

- a. Gaddis, John Lewis. "The long peace: Elements of stability in the postwar international system." *International security* 10.4 (1986): 99-142.
- b. Louis Menand, "Fat Man: Herman Kahn and the Nuclear Age", *The New Yorker*, June 27, 2005. Available at <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/06/27/fat-man>

**5. CMC: crisis decision-making (May 5<sup>th</sup>, 16.00-17.30)**

- a. Allison, Graham T. "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (Sep., 1969): 689-718

MAY 6<sup>TH</sup>

**6. Strategic Culture and Individual Agency (May 6<sup>th</sup>, 9.00-10.30)**

- a. The Atlantic Monthly; March 1997; China's Strategic Culture; Volume 279, No. 3; pages 103 - 105.
- b. Byman, Daniel L. and Kenneth M. Pollack, "Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 4, (March 2001): 107-146 (it's enough if you skim this one!)

**7. From Backwater to Global Hegemon: The United States and Grand Strategy (May 6<sup>th</sup>, 10.45-12.15 & 14.00-15.30)**

- a. No specific readings, but please monitor major US media outlets and keep track of current US foreign policy problems, with special emphasis on US-Chinese relations, the War on Terror, North Korea and Syria

**8. Humanitarian intervention (May 6<sup>th</sup>, 16.00-17.30)**

- a. Doyle, MW (2016) The politics of global humanitarianism: The responsibility to protect before and after Libya. *International Politics* 5314-31.
- b. John Mueller (2005) "The Iraq Syndrome." *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 84, no. 6, 2005, pp. 44–54.
- c. J. Kuperman (2015). Obama's Libya Debacle: How a Well-Meaning Intervention Ended in Failure. *Foreign Affairs*, 94, 66.