

## **IR 342: Nuclear Weapons, Great Power Competition, and Grand Strategy**

**Instructor: Jonathan N. Markowitz**

**Classroom: DMC 102**

**Course Time: Tuesday and Thursday from 5:00 - 6:20 PM**

**Office: DMC 301A (formerly called CPA “the building with the globe on it”)**

**Office Hours: Monday’s 1 -3:00 PM DMC 301. PLEASE DO NOT COME IF YOU ARE SICK. Appointments can be made using this link:**

<https://calendly.com/jonathanmarkowitz/15min>

### **Description of the Course and Learning Objectives:**

How have nuclear weapons shaped the past grand strategy of nations and the nature of great power competition? Will countries race to develop their own nuclear weapons if the U.S. adopts a more restrained grand strategy? If nations do acquire nuclear weapons, will they be emboldened to pursue more aggressive foreign policies? Do nuclear weapons make the world more or less peaceful? Debates over the answers to these questions are growing more intense as policymakers race to respond to a renewed era of great power competition, arming, and the risk of catastrophic nuclear war.

The goal of this course is to give students a foundational understanding of why debates over these questions are important, how to assess the strength of evidence that underpins each position, and to apply what they have learned to better understand the challenges that policymakers face in seeking to manage the risk of nuclear proliferation. This course will help students gain an understanding of how the development of nuclear weapons caused a massive shift in grand strategy and great power competition in the past and how it is likely to do so in the future.

This course is divided into three sections: 1) a historical overview of how the development of nuclear weapons shape grand strategy and great power competition; 2) a survey of what we know about what happens when states attempt to acquire nuclear weapons and how great powers have attempted to manage nuclear proliferation; 3) a review of what recent scholarship has discovered about how states behave once they acquire nuclear weapons and how this has shaped great power competition and grand strategy.

By the end of this course students should be able to demonstrate that they have achieved the following learning objectives:

- 1) Understand basic political economy concepts to understand contemporary policy issues.
- 2) Apply these concepts to analyze contemporary scholarly and policy debates.
- 3) Demonstrate their ability to communicate a compelling analytic argument regarding these policy issues in writing and present this argument as part of a class presentation.

**Grading Policy:** Grades will be based on participation, a nuclear notebook, in-class quizzes, film homework, a crisis simulation, and a midterm and final exam. Details of the crisis simulation, midterm and final will be distributed and discussed in class. No late papers will be accepted without proper medical documentation from a medical doctor. Participation will be based on general participation in class discussions. Note that the quizzes will cover not only the readings, but also international news. To stay up to date on global developments, students are encouraged to read the following news sites:

New York Times Online (<http://www.nytimes.com>)

Economist Online (<http://www.economist.com>)

Financial Times (<http://www.ft.com>)

BBC News (<http://news.bbc.co.uk>)

### **Assignment Overview:**

Class Participation	10%
Reading/ Movie Quizzes	20%
Crisis Simulation and Position Paper	20%
Midterm	25%
Final	25%

### **You must bring a notebook to class every day.**

The purpose of the class notebook is to take notes! I don't allow laptops or phones in class, so your class notebook is **where you will take class notes**. (You may only bring a laptop to class if you have made prior arrangement with me through DSP to accommodate a documented disability).

**Quizzes (10%)** Students are expected to complete all readings before the class sessions in which they are discussed. Quizzes may occur at any time and unprepared students will be downgraded. Students may not make up quizzes for classes they miss, but their lowest two quiz scores will be dropped.

**Film Homework (10%)** You will be given short homework assignments based on films for the class that you will watch at home.

**Crisis Simulation and Position Paper (20%)** Students will participate in a crisis simulation that will allow them to apply what they have learned by putting themselves in the shoes of the National Security Council. This is a high-impact pedagogical strategy that encourages students to think strategically and grapple with the real-world trade-offs that are not always evident to those

reading about events after the fact. Students will also write a policy memo. Note: while the crisis simulation will be done in groups, the policy memo is an individual effort. I will discuss more details about these assignments as the semester progresses.

**Midterm (20%) and Final (20%)** The exams will be closed-book and closed-notes. The midterm will be administered during class; the final will be held during the final exam period for this class. They will include multiple choice and short answer questions and will also ask you to define some key terms from the readings.

### **Students with Disabilities**

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to your TA) as early in the semester as possible. The phone number for DSP is 213-740-0776. If you need assistance with the process, please contact me at the phone number or e-mail address above.

### **Academic Dishonesty**

I take academic dishonesty EXTREMELY seriously. Any student violating USC's Academic Dishonesty or Student Conduct policies will earn an 'F' in the course and will be reported to the appropriate administrators for investigation. You are responsible for reviewing the [Trojan Integrity Guide](#); and the guide for avoiding plagiarism.

### **Course Schedule**

#### **PART 1: Historical Overview and Basic Concepts**

**Jan 14, 2025**

**Class Expectations**

**Jan 16, 2025**

**What is U.S. Grand Strategy?**

**Read:**

Lissner, Rebecca Friedman. "What Is Grand Strategy? Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield (November 2018)." *Texas National Security Review* (2018). **carefully read pg 54-57** Skim the rest.

Spykman, Nicholas John. *The geography of the peace*. Harcourt, Brace, 1944.

**Skim all of this book and carefully read pg 54 of 85 of the PDF.**

Kennan, George. "The long telegram." *The State Department*:  
<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/coldwar/documents/episode-1/kennan.htm> (1946).

**Jan 21, 2025**

**Grand Strategy Debates**

**Read:**

Posen, Barry R. "Pull Back: The Case for a Less Activist Foreign Policy." *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 92, no. 1, (2013), pp. 116–28.

Brooks, Stephen G., et al. "Lean Forward: In Defense of American Engagement." *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 92, no. 1, (2013), pp. 130–42.

Slaughter, Anne-Marie. "A World of Liberty Under Law." (2008).

Rice, Condoleezza. "Rethinking the national interest." *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 4, (2008), pp. 2-26.

Avey, Paul C., Jonathan N. Markowitz, & Robert J. Reardon. *Disentangling Grand Strategy: International Relations Theory and U.S. Grand Strategy (November 2018)*. 2018.

**Jan 23, 2025**

**Professor at conference. NO CLASS Make-up TBA**

**Jan 28, 2025**

**World War 2 and the Great Power Race for Nuclear Weapons**

**Read:**

Freedman, Lawrence, and Jeffrey Michaels. *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy: New, Updated and Completely Revised*. Springer, 2019. (Chapters 1-3)

**Jan 30, 2025**

**How the Unthinkable became Thinkable— First and only Use of Nuclear Weapons**

**Read:**

Walker, J. Samuel. *Prompt and utter destruction: Truman and the use of atomic bombs against Japan*. UNC Press Books, 2016. Pages 1-72

**Watch:** The Fog of War

**Feb 4, 2025**

**First and only Use of Nuclear Weapons Part 2**

**Read:**

Walker, J. Samuel. *Prompt and utter destruction: Truman and the use of atomic bombs against Japan*. UNC Press Books, 2016. Pages 75-131

**Feb 6, 2025**

**Professor at Workshop. NO CLASS. Make-up TBA**

**Feb 11, 2025**

**The Dawn of the Cold War and the Origins of American Nuclear Strategy Part 1**

Freedman, Lawrence, and Jeffrey Michaels. *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy: New, Updated and Completely Revised*. Springer, 2019. (Chapters 4)

Brodie, Bernard. *The Atomic Bomb and American Security*

**Feb 13, 2025**

**The Dawn of the Cold War and the Origins of American Nuclear Strategy Part 2**

**Read:**

Freedman, Lawrence, and Jeffrey Michaels. *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy: New, Updated and Completely Revised*. Springer, 2019. (Chapter 5-6)

**Watch:** Dr. Strangelove

Calculate the size of warhead needed to destroy Los Angeles.

<https://nuclearsecrecy.com/nukemap/>

**Feb 18, 2025**

**Massive Retaliation, Limited Nuclear War and Surprise Attacks**

**Read:**

Freedman, Lawrence, and Jeffrey Michaels. *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy: New, Updated and Completely Revised*. Springer, 2019. (Chapters 7-8)

Trachtenberg, Marc. (2007). Preventive War and U.S. Foreign Policy, *Security Studies*, 16:1, 1-31, DOI: 10.1080/09636410701304523

**Watch:** Wargames

**Feb 20, 2025**

**Challenges to Deterrence: Brinkmanship and The Cuban Missile Crisis**

**Read:**

Freedman, Lawrence, and Jeffrey Michaels. *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy: New, Updated and Completely Revised*. Springer, 2019. (Chapters 14-17)

Trachtenberg, Marc. "The influence of nuclear weapons in the Cuban missile crisis." *International Security* 10, no. 1 (1985): 137-163.

**Feb 25, 2025**

**The Quest for Credibility and Costly Signals Read:**

James D. Fearon. "Signaling foreign policy interests: Tying hands versus sinking costs." *Journal of conflict resolution* 41, no. 1 (1997): 68-90

Kai Quek, "Four costly signaling mechanisms." *American Political Science Review* 115, no. 2 (2021): 537-549.

**PART 2: What happens when states attempt to acquire nuclear weapons?**

**Feb 27, 2025**

**Why States Want Nuclear Weapons**

**Read:**

Sagan, Scott D. "The causes of nuclear weapons proliferation." *Annual Review of Political Science* 14 (2011): 225-244.

Scott D. Sagan. "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?: Three Models in Search of a Bomb." *International Security* 21.3 (1996/7): 54–86.

**Mar 4, 2025**

**Worrying About Proliferation**

**Read:**

Francis J. Gavin. "Same As It Ever Was: Nuclear Alarmism, Proliferation, and the Cold War." *International Security* 34.3 (2010): 7–37.

Miller, Nicholas L. "Nuclear Dominoes: A Self-Defeating Prophecy?" *Security Studies* 23, no. 1 (2014): 33-73.

**Mar 6, 2025: MIDTERM STUDY**

**No Readings. Study for Midterm**

**Mar 11, 2025: MIDTERM**

**Mar 13, 2025**

**Is the Spread of Nuclear Weapons Good or Bad?**

**Debate: Is the Spread of Nuclear Weapons Good or Bad?**

**Read:**

Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz. *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: An Enduring Debate.*

W. W. Norton and Company, 2012. Chapters 1–2

**Mar 18, 2025**  
**SPRING BREAK**

**Mar 20, 2025**  
**SPRING BREAK**

**Mar 25, 2025**  
**What We Can Learn from Real World Cases of Proliferation Part 1 The Case of Iraq**  
**Read:**

Hal Brands and David Palkki. “Saddam, Israel, and the Bomb: Nuclear Alarmism Justified?”  
*International Security* 36.1 (2011): 133–166.

**Mar 27, 2025**  
**What We can Learn from Real-World Cases of Proliferation Part 2: Force Postures**

Vipin Narang. “Posturing for Peace? Pakistan’s Nuclear Postures and South Asian Stability.”  
*International Security* 34.3 (2010): 38–78

**Apr 1, 2025**  
**What We can Learn from Real-World Cases of Proliferation Part 3: China**

Fiona S. Cunningham and M. Taylor Fravel, “Assuring Assured Retaliation: China’s  
Nuclear Posture and U.S.-China Strategic Stability,” *International Security*, Vol. 40, No.  
2 (Fall 2015), pages 7-50

**Apr 3, 2025**  
**Attempt to Counter-Nuclear Proliferation through the NPR + NPT**  
**Read:**

Coe, Andrew J., and Jane Vaynman. "Collusion and the nuclear nonproliferation regime." *The Journal of Politics* 77, no. 4 (2015): 983-997.

George Bunn. “The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty: History and Current Problems.” *Arms Control Today* (December 2003).

Jaswant Singh. “Against Nuclear Apartheid.” *Foreign Affairs* 77.5 (1998): 41–52.

**PART 3: What happens after states acquire nuclear weapons?**

**Apr 8, 2025**

**Attempts to Counter Proliferation by Force Part 1:**

**Read:**

Braut-Hegghammer, Målfrid. "Revisiting Osirak: Preventive Attacks and Nuclear Proliferation Risks." *International Security* 36, no. 1 (2011): 101-132.

Reiter, Dan. "Preventive attacks against nuclear programs and the "Success" at Osiraq." *Nonproliferation Review* 12, no. 2 (2005): 355-371.

**Apr 10, 2025**

**Attempts to Counter Proliferation by Force Part 2:**

**Read:**

Muhammet A. Bas, Andrew J. Coe, and Eliza Gheorghe. "Deal or No Deal: Responses to States on the Verge of Proliferation" *Forthcoming at the Journal of Politics*

Sarah E. Kreps and Matthew Fuhrmann. "Attacking the Atom: Does Bombing Nuclear Facilities Affect Proliferation?" *Journal of Strategic Studies* 34.2 (2011): 161–187.

**Apr 15, 2025**

**Was there Really a Nuclear Revolution?**

**Read:**

Jervis, Robert. *The meaning of the nuclear revolution: Statecraft and the prospect of Armageddon*. Cornell University Press, 1989. Pages 1-45

Lieber, Keir A., and Daryl G. Press. "The new era of counterforce: Technological change and the future of nuclear deterrence." *International Security* 41, no. 4 (2017): 9-49.

**Apr 17, 2025**

**Crisis Simulation**

**Apr 22, 2025**

**Crisis Simulation**

**Apr 24, 2025**

**Crisis Simulation**



**Apr 29, 2025**  
**Crisis Simulation**

**May 1, 2025**  
**Final Paper Due**