

# NUCLEAR POLITICS

POLS XXXX

Semester

Colleen Larkin

Meeting Times

Email

Meeting Location

Office Hours: Days and Times, Location

## Course Description

This course evaluates the effects of nuclear weapons on world politics. It traces the development of nuclear weapons and strategy from their origins in World War II through technological developments today. The course also covers the impact of nuclear proliferation on relations between states as well as the evolution and effects of the nonproliferation regime. Additional topics include theories of nuclear deterrence, the existence of the nuclear taboo, nuclear safety and effects, the morality of nuclear weapons, and the prospects for arms control and nuclear abolition.

## Prerequisites

This course is designed for advanced undergraduates. Students must have taken an introductory IR course, and preferably at least one additional course focused on international security issues.

## Learning Objectives

Throughout this course, students will:

- Gain an understanding of key theoretical concepts in nuclear politics and apply them to the analysis of historical and contemporary nuclear issues
- Evaluate primary sources to evaluate existing theories and narratives about nuclear politics as well as form their own conjectures about the effects of nuclear weapons on international politics
- Critically analyze contemporary nuclear issues and argue for or against specific policy positions
- Develop strong written communication skills, arguing clearly and persuasively for various audiences
- Strengthen their ability to collaborate with other students in teams in the context of nuclear policy problem-solving

## Requirements

At a glance:

- Participation 10%
- Artifact Paper 15%

- Midterm 25%
- Simulation Reflection 20%
- Final Exam 30%

Participation. (10%) Participation is an essential component of this course. Quality participation includes: coming to the section prepared to discuss the readings, actively listening to your peers, asking questions, and responding to others' comments and questions. The course also includes a simulation, participation in which will count towards the participation grade.

Artifact Paper. (15%) Students will choose one primary source document (to be distributed) and contextualize it within the evolution of nuclear strategy ideas. How does this document conceptualize nuclear deterrence? What were the probable causes and consequences of this strategy? How does this compare to other theories of deterrence and escalation? The paper should also draw on course materials.

Midterm. (25%) The midterm essay will ask you to draw on course materials to analyze an argument about the effects of nuclear weapons on politics. You will be expected to draw on both historical evidence and theoretical concepts to support your argument and evaluate the counterfactual.

Simulation Reflection. 20% The in-class simulation will debate the future of the US's nuclear posture. The reflection will include a policy memo written collectively with your simulation group, as well as individual short reflection essays.

Final Exam. (30%) Two essays that will ask you to draw on materials from the entire course to answer questions, with emphasis on topics covered after the midterm.

## Course Readings

I expect students to come to class having done the readings listed on the syllabus for that day. This is an advanced course, which entails a good deal of reading. As these are often more complex readings, I encourage you to plan ahead (i.e. not read everything the night before). You will be expected to analyze and evaluate the readings in class discussions and written assignments, not just summarize them. All readings for each class will be available through the course website.

## Course Policies

- **Course Website.** Available at (link). This includes an electronic form of this syllabus, links to all readings, and discussion forums for posting current events articles.
- **Email.** I can be reached at [csl2174@columbia.edu](mailto:csl2174@columbia.edu). I try to respond to emails within 24 hours during the work week, but may be slower responding to emails sent late at night or on weekends.

- **Technology.** Please keep laptop and tablet use to a minimum. They should only be used to take notes or reference readings online. I expect everyone to stay engaged in the class discussion. Please silence your cell phone and do not take it out during class.
- **Late Assignments.** A half letter grade will be deducted for each day an assignment is late. I will not grant extensions except in case of emergencies.
- **Accommodations.** Any student with a disability that may affect their academic or personal well-being should reach out to me as soon as possible to discuss accommodations. You should also reach out to the Office of Disability Services ([link](#))
- **Honor Code.** Please do not plagiarize, and please abide by the university's honor code ([link](#)). When in doubt, cite your sources!

## SCHEDULE

### Introduction: What are nuclear weapons?

- Kelsey D. Atherton, "Airplane Mode." *Vice* (2018), <https://www.vice.com/en/article/ne4p77/airplane-mode>
- Lynn Eden, *Whole World on Fire* (2004), Ch. 1.
- Real Chemistry, "How do Nuclear Bombs Work?" (2020), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXuhaZmpQu8>
- Federation of American Scientists, "Status of World Nuclear Forces" (2023), <https://fas.org/initiative/status-world-nuclear-forces/>

### The decision to drop the atomic bomb

- Ward Wilson, "The Winning Weapon? Rethinking Nuclear Weapons in Light of Hiroshima." *International Security* 31 no. 4 (2007): 162-79.
- John Hersey, "Hiroshima." *New Yorker* (1946), <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1946/08/31/hiroshima>
- Barton J. Bernstein, "The Atomic Bombings Reconsidered." *Foreign Affairs* 74 no. 1 (1995): 135-52.

### The development of US nuclear strategy

- Bernard Brodie, *The Absolute Weapon: Atomic Power and World Order* (1946), Ch 1-2.
- Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy* (2019), 35-50; 83-100.
- Carol Cohn, "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals." *Signs* 12 no. 4 (1987): 687-718.

### Soviet Nuclear Strategy

- David Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb* (1994), Chs. 11-13.

### **Cold War Crises**

- Matthew Kroenig, "Nuclear superiority and the balance of resolve: Explaining nuclear crisis outcomes." *International Organization* 67 no. 1 (2013): 141-171.
- Marc Trachtenberg, "The influence of nuclear weapons in the Cuban missile crisis." *International Security* 10, no. 1 (1985): 137-163.
- Rosemary J. Foot, "Nuclear coercion and the ending of the Korean conflict." *International Security* (1988): 92-112.

### **Nuclear Weapons and Extended Deterrence**

- Se Young Jang, "The evolution of US extended deterrence and South Korea's nuclear ambitions." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 39, no. 4 (2016): 502-520.
- Neil Narang and Rupal N. Mehta, "The unforeseen consequences of extended deterrence: Moral hazard in a nuclear client state." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63, no. 1 (2019): 218-250.

### **Nuclear Escalation**

- Austin Long and Brendan Rittenhouse Green, "Stalking the secure second strike: Intelligence, counterforce, and nuclear strategy." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 1-2 (2015): 38-73.
- Scott D. Sagan, *Moving Targets* (1990), 58-97.
- William Burr, "How to Fight a Nuclear War," *Foreign Policy* (Sept 14, 2012).

### **Nuclear Strategy on Film**

- *Dr. Strangelove*, 1964 (watch in class)

### **Nuclear Command and Control**

- Scott Sagan, *The Limits of Safety: Organizations, Accidents, and Nuclear Weapons* (1993), Chs 1, 5.

### **Nuclear Proliferation**

- Scott Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of a Bomb," *International Security*, 21, no. 3, (1996/1997): 54-86.
- Jacques Hymans, *Achieving Nuclear Ambitions: Scientists, Politicians, and Proliferation* (2012), 79-156.

- Council on Foreign Relations, The Politics of Proliferation: A Conversation with Matthew Fuhrmann (podcast), 2016,  
<https://www.cfr.org/podcasts/politics-proliferation-conversation-matthew-fuhrmann>

### **Proliferation: India and Pakistan**

- Vipin Narang, "Strategies of nuclear proliferation: How states pursue the bomb." *International Security* 41, no. 3 (2016): 110-150.
- Farzana Shaikh, "Pakistan's nuclear bomb: beyond the non-proliferation regime." *International Affairs* 78, no. 1 (2002): 29-48.

### **Preventing Proliferation: Coercive Options**

- Målfrid Braut-Hegghammer, "Revisiting Osirak: Preventive attacks and nuclear proliferation risks." *International Security* 36, no. 1 (2011): 101-132.
- Gerzhoy, Gene. "Alliance coercion and nuclear restraint: How the United States thwarted West Germany's nuclear ambitions." *International Security* 39, no. 4 (2015): 91-129.

### **Preventing Proliferation: Institutions**

- Text of Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty
- Carlo Patti, *Brazil in the Global Nuclear Order, 1945–2018*. (2021), 157-190.
- Alexander H. Montgomery, "Ringing in proliferation: How to dismantle an atomic bomb network." *International Security* 30, no. 2 (2005): 153-187.

### **Arms Control**

- James Cameron, "Soviet-American Strategic Arms Limitation and the Limits of Co-operative Competition." *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 33, no. 1 (2022): 111-132.
- Heather Williams, "Russia still needs arms control." *Arms Control Today* 46, no. 1 (2016).
- Naomi Egel and Jayne Vaynman, "Reconsidering Arms Control Orthodoxy," *War on the Rocks* (March 26, 2021),  
<https://warontherocks.com/2021/03/reconsidering-arms-control-orthodoxy/>

### **Nuclear Norms**

- Nina Tannenwald, "The nuclear taboo: The United States and the normative basis of nuclear non-use." *International organization* 53, no. 3 (1999): 433-468.

- Daryl G. Press, Scott D. Sagan, and Benjamin A. Valentino. "Atomic aversion: Experimental evidence on taboos, traditions, and the non-use of nuclear weapons." *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 1 (2013): 188-206.

### **Atomic Effects**

- James Acton, "Wagging the Plutonium Dog: Japanese Domestic Politics and Its International Security Implications," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2015).
- Nic Maclellan, "The nuclear age in the Pacific islands." *The Contemporary Pacific* (2005): 363-372.
- Stawkowski, Magdalena E. "'I am a radioactive mutant': Emergent biological subjectivities at Kazakhstan's Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site." *American Ethnologist* 43, no. 1 (2016): 144-157.

### **Contemporary Challenges - Iran**

- Nicholas Miller and Or Rabinowitz, "Why the Iran deal is a logical extension of U.S. nonproliferation policy" *Monkey Cage Blog, Washington Post* (2015)
- Matthew Bunn, "The US Has No Good Options on Iran," *Foreign Affairs* (2022)
- "What is the Iran Nuclear Deal?" Council on Foreign Relations, <https://www.cfr.org/background/what-iran-nuclear-deal>

### **Contemporary Challenges - North Korea**

- Van Jackson, "Threat Consensus and Rapprochement Failure: Revisiting the Collapse of US–North Korea Relations, 1994–2002." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 14 no. 2 (2018): 235-253.
- Sue Mi Terry, "The New North Korean Threat." *Foreign Affairs* (January 19, 2023), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/north-korea/new-north-korean-threat>

### **Nuclear Modernization I - US-China**

- Fiona S. Cunningham and M. Taylor Fravel. "Assuring Assured Retaliation: China's Nuclear Posture and US-China Strategic Stability." *International Security* 40, no. 2 (2015): 7-50.
- Caitlin Talmadge, "The US-China nuclear relationship: Why competition is likely to intensify US-China confrontation." Brookings (2019), <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/china-and-nuclear-weapons/>

### **Nuclear Modernization II - New Technology**

- Cheryl Rofer, “Low-Yield Nukes Are a Danger, Not a Deterrent, *Foreign Policy* (Feb 2020), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/02/11/deterrence-nuclear-war-low-yield-nukes-danger-not-deterrent/>
- Austin Long, “Discrimination Details Matter: Clarifying an Argument about Low-Yield Nuclear Warheads” *War on the Rocks* (Feb 16, 2018), <https://warontherocks.com/2018/02/discrimination-details-matter-clarifying-argument-low-yield-nuclear-warheads/>
- Page Stoutland, “Growing Threat: Cyber and Nuclear Weapons Systems,” *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* (Oct 2017), <https://thebulletin.org/2017/10/growing-threat-cyber-and-nuclear-weapons-systems/>

### **Nuclear Abolition**

- Shultz, George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger, and Sam Nunn. "A world free of nuclear weapons." *Wall Street Journal* 4 (2007): A15.
- Josef Joffe and James W. Davis. "Less than zero: Bursting the new disarmament bubble." *Foreign Affairs* (2011): 7-13.
- Rebecca Davis Gibbons, “Addressing the Nuclear Ban Treaty,” *The Washington Quarterly* 42 no. 1 (2019): 27-40.

### **Simulation - Designing US Nuclear Posture**

- Selected nuclear policy documents

### **Simulation presentations**

### **FINAL EXAM**